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# A Survey of the Critical Writings on Jane Austen

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A SURVEY OF THE CRITICAL WRITINGS  
ON JANE AUSTEN

By

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
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## VITA

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## INTRODUCTION

When Jane Austen died July 24, 1817, four of her novels:

Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, Mansfield Park, and Emma, had been published and received by the readers of her day with cordial interest, even if not with undue enthusiasm. Within a year of her death Northanger Abbey and Persuasion were offered for publication by her nephew, J.E. Austen Leigh.<sup>1</sup> These six books, together with the apparently discarded Lady Susan, the incomplete story, The Watsons, the fragment Sandition, and three copy books of Juvenalia, constitute her entire creative accomplishment.

Geoffrey Keynes in 1929 listed 185 biographical and critical entries, commenting on the fact that "the stream of comment has swollen greatly...and it is difficult to believe that much more can remain to be said."<sup>2</sup>

But more was said. Though I make no pretense as to completeness, fourteen books have been found which were written since that date, devoted entirely or partially to a consideration of her life and work; forty-six articles in periodicals have been discovered, all discussing various problems relative to the novels.

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<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Keynes. Jane Austen: A Bibliography. Nonesuch Press, London, 1929, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., preface, p. xxiii.

A survey has revealed, however, that although much has been written, the criticisms judged by modern standards, have erred on the side of excessive subjectivity. From Sir Walter Scott's fervidly enthusiastic judgment of Emma in the Quarterly Review, 1815, to Mary Lascelles' Jane Austen and Her Art, 1939, comment has had its end in view--a bias preconceived and definitive, a pro or con so decisive as to impair the value of the conclusion.

Most of the work has taken the direction of biographical investigation in which criticism is incidental, and the "professed critics...have all chosen to work on a small scale--so small that the reader does not see how they have reached the conclusions until he has patiently found his own way to them." <sup>3</sup>

One looks in vain for a complete estimate which shall set Jane Austen's novels in the relation with the age she lived in, and the conditions of her work. <sup>4</sup>

The chief aim of this study is to examine English and American criticisms of Jane Austen, with the intention of showing through a summary of selected representative criticisms, informal and formal, contemporary 19th century, and modern, that an adequate objective analysis of her works and style has yet to be made in English. The study

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Lascelles. Jane Austen and Her Art. The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1939, preface, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> W. Robertson Nicoll. A Bookman's Letters. Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1913, p. 166.

will likewise attempt to show how the varying ideas as to criticism during the different periods, had their effect upon the critics' attitudes toward Jane Austen. So far as is compatible with the chief purpose of the study, the errors of previous critics will be indicated, and suggestions offered for a complete and convincing estimate of Jane Austen's work.

## CHAPTER I

### THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF JANE AUSTEN'S NOVELS

#### BY HER CONTEMPORARIES

In considering the criticism Jane Austen's work received during her life time, it is important to remember that she herself in all probability saw none of the printed reviews, with the exception of that by Scott in the Quarterly of March, 1816,--and that even in that case she was ignorant of the author.<sup>1</sup> She was at pains to collect and write out the opinions expressed by members of her circle, on Mansfield Park and on Emma, about the time of their publication,<sup>2</sup> and it is only reasonable to suppose she would have made note of any evidence of more formal criticism had she known of its existence.

Though appreciative of praise she was suspicious of what seemed to her an absurd fuss about her writing, "They cost so little."<sup>3</sup> It would have been entirely to her taste had she known that when she died in 1817 there was no mention of her, or of her writing, in any newspaper or periodical of the day.<sup>4</sup>

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1 G.E. Mitton. Jane Austen and Her Times. Methuen, London, 1905, p. 311.

2 Jane Austen. Plan of a Novel. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1926, preface, p. 1.

3 J. Edward Bennett. "Jane Austen?" New Century Review, 1898, p. 321.

4 Mrs. Charles Malden. Jane Austen. Roberts, Boston, 1889, p. 5.



The early biographers of Jane Austen were imbued with a similar reticence. Six months after her death her brother Henry, in the Introduction to the first edition of Northanger Abbey and Persuasion, hazards with fraternal partiality, the boast that her works have by many been placed on the same shelf as the works of D'Arblay and Edgeworth; and her nephew, the writer of the original Memoir, looking back, at the last years of his life, after the lapse of half a century is even more explicit.

Sometimes a friend or neighbor who chanced to know our connexion with the author would condescend to speak with moderate approbation of Sense and Sensibility, or Pride and Prejudice. But if they had known that we, in our secret hearts, classed her with Madame D'Arblay or Miss Edgeworth, or even with some other novel writers of the day, whose names are now scarcely remembered, they would have considered it an amusing instance of family conceit.<sup>5</sup>

Later biographers have used the anecdote as the basis for belief in a posthumous fame. According to them Jane Austen was an unknown and ignored novelist to the critics of her own day, and the later 19th century.

The facts prove that such was not the case. In May, 1812, The British Critic printed the first review of Sense and Sensibility. It is interesting to note that this unknown critic clearly identified the qualities which distinguish her work.

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5 W. Moberley; Jane Austen," Dublin Review, Vol. 155, p. 153.

The characters are happily delineated and admirably sustained...An intimate knowledge of life and of the female character is exemplified in the various personages and incidents which are introduced, and nothing can be more happily portrayed than the picture of the elder brother, who required by his dying father to assist his mother and sisters, first resolves to give the sisters a thousand pounds a-piece, but after a certain deliberation with himself, and dialogue with his amiable wife, persuades himself that a little fish and game occasionally sent, will fulfil the real intentions of his father, and satisfy every obligation of duty. 6

There is a bit of moralizing on the value of the books for "our female friends", since "they may learn from them, if they please, many sober and salutary maxims for the conduct of life", <sup>7</sup> and the critic concludes by noting that "the good humoured Baronet, who is never happy but with his house full of people is rather over-charged for this trifling defect there is ample compensation." <sup>18</sup>

The following year the same periodical printed a review of Pride and Prejudice, interesting as the first printed criticism of this novel, but still more for the lie it gives to those who hold that Jane Austen's work was so contrary to the Gothic romances popular during her day that it was ignored for that reason by contemporary critics.

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6 The British Critic, Vol. 39, p. 527.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

The review says plainly enough:

It is very far superior to almost all the publications of the kind which have lately come before us...The story is well told, the characters remarkably well drawn and supported, and written with great spirit as well as vigour. 9

His comments on the characters are astute and sound, and will be repeated with increased emphasis and verbosity by scores of later critics.

Elizabeth Bennet, the heroine, is supported with great spirit and consistency throughout; there seems no defect in the portrait; this is not precisely the case with Darcy her lover, his easy unconcern and fashionable indifference somewhat abruptly changes to the ardent lover. The character of Mr. Collins, the obsequious rector, is excellent. 10

In July, 1816, Emma was given recognition by the same periodical; and the same sane standards of criticism were evident. Calling attention to the unity of place the reviewer notes that the author of Emma never goes "beyond the boundaries of two private families, but has contrived in a very interesting manner to detail their history, and to form out of so slender materials a very pleasing tale." 11

The basis for all future criticism is contained in these three contemporary reviews. Later critics may have something to add, but many of them will do no more than put flesh upon these bones.

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9 The British Critic, Vol. 41, p. 189.

10 Ibid., p. 190.

11 Ibid., p. 96.

Reference has already been made to Scott's review of Emma in the Quarterly Review,<sup>12</sup> as the only printed review Jane Austen ever saw.

It is, incidentally, the first listed by Keynes. Scott's personal admiration for Jane Austen's writing was genuine. In his Journal for March, 1826, he refers to his third reading of Pride and Prejudice and remarks that

That young lady had a talent for describing the involvements and feelings of ordinary life, which is to me the most wonderful I have ever met with. Big Bow-Wow strain I can do myself, like any now going; but the exquisite touch, which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting from the truth of the description and the sentiment, is denied me. 13

But the critical canons of 1815 rested on the assumption that it was the proper business of criticism, not so much to display characteristic excellences as to detect imperfections; "to play the judge's part in condemning, or the police sergeant's part in apprehending literary defaulters."<sup>14</sup>

This view of the functions of criticism accounts somewhat for the touch of acerbity displayed in parts of the review. Scott spends seven of the thirteen pages of his article in general talk about novels, before he comes to Jane Austen, and then "he writes like a

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12 Sir Walter Scott, "Emma", The Quarterly Review, Vol. 14, pp. 188-201.

13 Sir Walter Scott, Journal, p. 135.

14 T. Hall Caine. Cobwebs of Criticism. Elliot Stock, London, 1883, intro. p. xxii.

a half-hearted advocate of an unpopular cause." <sup>15</sup>

Of the six remaining pages he devotes two to a discussion of her work as a whole, celebrating the fact that she has developed and crystalized by her art that form of realistic fiction, which, he says, "has arisen almost in our own times, and which draws the characters and incidents introduced more immediately from the current of ordinary life than was permitted by the former rules of the novel." <sup>16</sup>

Summarizing the plot he finds fault with the minute detail, and declares that although Mr. Woodhouse and Miss Bates are admirably presented, we see too much of them, and their prosing is apt to become as tiresome in fiction as in real society. <sup>17</sup> Scott attacks what he considers Jane Austen's want of sensibility in the "kingdom of Cupid" by insinuating that Elizabeth Bennet in Pride and Prejudice, having refused Darcy, "does not see that she has done a foolish thing until she accidentally visits the very handsome seat and grounds belonging to her admirer." <sup>18</sup>

It is an amusing conclusion, but one that a careful reading of the text might have prevented. Jane Austen herself, of course, is responsible for it, for she permits Elizabeth to answer Jane's

"Now, be, be serious...Will you tell me how long you have loved him?"

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15 Rev. G. Salmon. "More About Jane Austen", Temple Bar, Vol. 122, p. 458.

16 Sir Walter Scott. "Review on Emma," Famous Reviews, ed. by R. Brimley Johnson, Pitman, London, 1914, p. 211.

17 Ibid., p. 221.

18 Ibid., p. 217.

with

"It has been coming on so gradually that I hardly know when it began. But, I believe I must date it from my first seeing the beautiful grounds at Pemberley." 19

Another entreaty that she should be serious, however, produced the desired effect, and she was satisfied by her solemn assurances of attachment.

It would seem that Scott failed in attention and "missed the distinction between Charlotte Lucas' cynicism and Elizabeth Bennet's ironical affectation of it, in regard to marriage." 20

It is interesting to note in connection with Scott's objection to substituting calculating prudence for "the romantic feelings which were fanned into a powerful flame",<sup>21</sup> that Lady Frances Shelley takes Scott to task for his failure to give his heroes and heroines a higher tone of feeling than accords with common experience.

The same objection may be made to all Jane Austen's novels...Surely works of imagination should raise us above our everyday feelings, and excite in us those elans passageres of virtue and sensibility which are exquisite and ennobling. 22

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19 Jane Austen. Pride and Prejudice. Richards, London, 1898, ch. lix, p. 373.

20 Mary Lascelles. Op.Cit., p. 118.

21 Scott, Op. cit., p. 221.

22 Lady Frances Shelley. Life and Diary, Vol. 2. John Murray, London, 1913, p. 64.

No further notice was taken of Jane Austen or her novels from Scott's review in 1816, until Archbishop Whately's reviews of Northanger Abbey, and Persuasion, in the Quarterly Review, January, 1821. Helm notes as striking proof of how little was known about her, the fact that four years after her death neither Whately himself, nor the editor of the Quarterly Review knew how to spell her name. <sup>23</sup>

True to his time Whately introduces his eighteen page review with ten pages of general discussion upon novels and the writings of Fielding, Defoe, Addison, and Miss Edgeworth. When he finally arrives at the novels in question he considers their realism, their characterization, and their morality.

"The moral lessons of this lady's novels," wrote Whately,... "though clearly and impressively conveyed are not offensively put forward, but spring incidentally from the circumstances of the story." <sup>24</sup>

Indeed, so inoffensively are they offered that Dr. Whately himself seems to have been unable to discover them at all.

On the whole...Miss Austen's work may be safely recommended, not only as among the most unexceptionable of their class, but as combining in an eminent degree, instruction with amusement, though without the direct effort at the former of which we have complained as sometimes defeating its object. <sup>25</sup>

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- 23 W. H. Helm, Jane Austen and Her Country House Comedy. Nash, London, 1908, p. 162.
- 24 Archbishop R. Whately. "Northanger Abbey and Persuasion", The Quarterly Review, Vol. 24, p. 360.
- 25 Ibid., p. 361.

Although "hately strained a point with Jane Austen's morality, his criticism of her characters is discriminating and fine. Comparing her with Shakespeare, (not the first, the most important, nor the last critic to do so) he explains

Like him she shows as admirable a discrimination in the character of fools as of people of sense. To invent, indeed, a conversation full of wisdom or of wit, requires that the writer should himself possess ability; but the converse does not hold good: it is no fool that can describe fools well; and many who have succeeded pretty well in painting superior characters have failed in giving individuality to those weaker ones which it is necessary to introduce in order to give a faithful representation of life. 26

One would suppose that criticisms such as these would be inevitably followed by studies of a more complete and analytical nature. Such, however, was not the case.

If we look at Hazlitt's account of the English novelists in his Lectures on the Comic Writers, we find Mrs. Radcliffe, Mrs. Inchbald, Mrs. Opie, Miss Burney, and Miss Edgeworth receiving due honor, and more than is due; but no hint that Miss Austen has written a line. If we cast a glance over the list of English authors republished by Baudry, Galignani and Tauchnitz, we find there writers of the very smallest pretensions, but not Jane Austen. 27

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26 Ibid., p. 362.

27 Blackwoods, Vol. 86, p. 99.



Collected biographies of the type of Mrs. Hale's which gave Sketches of all distinguished Women from the Beginning till A.D. 1850, devoted ten pages to Jane Austen. There was no attempt at evaluation or distinction, as a quotation will suffice to show.

The style of her familiar correspondence was in all respects the same as that of her novels. Everything came finished from her pen, for on all subjects she had ideas as clear as her expressions were well chosen. 28

Allan Cunningham in his History of the British Literature of the Last 50 Years, disposes of her in one page.

The works of Jane Austen have quietly won their way to the public heart, as all works of genius will. She is a prudent writer; there is good sense in what she says, a propriety in all her actions; and she sets her face zealously against romantic attachments. 29

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and David Masson finishes her off in three sentences. Mrs. Ellwood is more generous, and gives twelve pages to biography, summaries of the books, and comments, of which the following extracts are typical.

The reading of Miss Austen was very extensive in history and belles lettres, and it would be difficult to say at what age she was not intimately and critically acquainted with the best essays and novels in the English language...the character of

28 Sarah Josepha Hale. Sketches of All Distinguished Women, from "The Beginning" till A.D. 1850. Harper and Brothers, New York, 1853, p. 185.

29 Allan Cunningham. History of the British Literature of the Last 50 Years, p. 167.

30 David Masson. British Novelists and Their Styles. Gould & Lincoln, London, 1859, p. 195.

Macaulay has, of course, a tendency to cocksureness, as  
Saintsbury has pointed out,<sup>34</sup> a sweeping indulgence in superlatives  
which is the very negation of the critical attitude. But, as Farrer  
shows, he undoubtedly hits the bull's eye when he lights on the fact  
that Jane Austen is comparable only to Shakespeare; for both attain  
their solitary and special supremacy by dint of a common capacity for  
intense vitalisation; both for the culminating gift of immediately  
projecting a living being who is not only a human being, but also some-  
thing greater than any one person, a quintessentialized instance of  
humanity, a generalisation made incarnate and personal by genius.<sup>35</sup>

Tennyson too, felt compelled to compare her with Shakespeare.  
"The realism and life-likeness of Miss Austen's Dramatis Personae  
come nearest to those of Shakespeare--Shakespeare, however, is a sun to  
which Jane Austen, though a bright and true little world is but an  
asteroid."<sup>36</sup>

George Lewes assigned a position to Jane Austen next to Fielding,  
whom he classes the "greatest novelist in our language,"<sup>37</sup> and  
commenting on Macaulay's comparison of her talent with that of  
Shakespeare, he declares, "The greatness of Miss Austen, her marvelous  
dramatic powers, more than anything in Scott, is akin to the greatest  
quality in Shakespeare."<sup>38</sup>

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34 George Saintsbury, History of Criticism, p. 491.

35 Reginald Farrer. "Jane Austen, ob. July 18, 1817", Quarterly Review,  
Vol. 228, p.2.

36 Alfred Lord Tennyson. A Memoir by His Son. Vol. 2, p. 371.

37 G.H.Lewes. "Recent Novels," Fraser's Magazine, Vol. 36, p. 687.

38 Ibid.

These comparisons with Shakespeare, are, of course, unfortunate, for their very exaggeration covers the excellencies in Jane Austen, which they were meant to display. Whately, Macaulay and Lewes' glib comparison was destined to be repeated by scores of other admirers even after 1886 when Coventry Patmore's sharp analysis detected the inherent fallacy in any such terms. 39

Lewes' review achieved some purpose, however, for it roused Charlotte Bronte to read Pride and Prejudice, though it did not increase her admiration of it. She summed up her impressions and sent them to Lewes.

What did I find? Accurate daguerrotyped portraits of a commonplace face, a carefully fenced, highly cultivated garden with neat borders and delicate flowers; but no glance of bright vivid physiognomy, no open country, no fresh air, no blue hill, no bonny beck. I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen in their elegant but confined houses...Miss Austen is only shrewd and observant. 40

Elizabeth Browning apparently agreed, for in a letter to John Ruskin she said, "Miss Austen's people struck me as wanting souls, even more than is necessary for men and women of the world. The novels are perfect, as far as they go, that's certain. Only, they don't go far." 41

Maria Edgeworth, with whom Jane Austen has been contrasted, refers but once to her work. She denies the reality of portraiture in

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- 39 Coventry Patmore. "Comparing Small Things", first appeared in St. James Gazette, January 22, 1886. Reprinted in Courage and Politics, Milford, London, 1921, pp. 65-9.
- 40 Charlotte Bronte. Life, Vol. 2. Letter of Jan. 12, 1848, p. 54.
- 41 Elizabeth B. Browning. "Letter to Mr. Ruskin". Letters, ed. by Frederic J. Kenyon. Macmillan, New York, 1897, p. 217.

Northanger Abbey, though she classifies the characterization of the lovers in Mansfield Park as "exceedingly interesting and natural." <sup>42</sup>

Southey and Coleridge were appreciative of the sincerity of her touch. In a letter to Sir Egerton Brydges, Southey states that "her novels are more true to nature, and have for my sympathies, passages of finer feeling than any others of this age. Coleridge praised them as being in their way perfectly genuine and individual productions." <sup>43</sup>

Wordsworth used to say that though he admitted that her novels were an admirable copy of life he could not be interested in productions of that kind; unless the truth of nature were presented to him "clarified, as it were by the pervading light of imagination", <sup>44</sup> it had scarce any attractions in his eyes.

An examination of the period from 1812 to 1850 forces the conclusion that during that time there was no appreciable effort at an accurate criticism of the novels. Though the first reviews were accurate in their appraisals, they were mere reviews, and as such, made no pretence of analysing either the matter or style. Later writers either attempted to read in her realistic portrayals an ethical end; or, coming to her with a preconceived idea as to her merits, were so unreserved in praise as to be unreliable critics.

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- 42 Marie Edgeworth. Life and Letters. Vol. 1, Augustine Hare, London, 1894, p. 246.
- 43 S.S. Conant. "Jane Austen", Harpers New Monthly, Vol. 41, p. 225.
- 44 Sara Coleridge. Memoir and Letters of Sara Coleridge. Vol. 1, Henry S. King and Co., London, 1873, p. 75.

The casual references which appear in published diaries and letters of the period show that, although interest in her work was spasmodic, it was steadily increasing in momentum, and a larger reading public might be expected to result in substantial contributions by the several critics of note in the later 19th century.

## CHAPTER II

### LATER 19TH CENTURY CRITICAL COMMENT

During the period from 1850-1900 nine editions of Jane Austen's collected works appeared, thirteen of Sense and Sensibility, sixteen of Pride and Prejudice, twelve of Mansfield Park, nine of Emma, and thirteen of Northanger Abbey and Persuasion.<sup>1</sup> The evidence is clear that the novels were both read and appreciated. It is surprising therefore, to discover that critical comments were comparatively few; and it was not until 1899 that the first book of Austen criticism appeared, W.H. Pollock's Jane Austen, Her Contemporaries and Herself.<sup>2</sup>

3

Four biographies followed the Memoirs,<sup>3</sup> produced by her nephew, J.E. Austen-Leigh, and although those by Goldwin Smith and Oscar Adams show a marked tendency to criticism, it is primarily of a desultory nature. Such brief accounts as appear in the various Histories of Literature, or collections of Essays, merely reiterate many of the critical opinions common in the early part of the century, and when original, for the most part are so lacking in critical balance as to be practically worthless. It was in the periodicals of the later 19th

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1 Keynes, Op. cit., pp. 157-204.

2 W.H. Pollock. Jane Austen, Her Contemporaries and Herself. Longmans, Green, London, 1899.

3 J. E. Austen-Leigh. Memoir of Jane Austen. Bentley, London, 1871.

century then, that Jane Austen was best handled, but their value can be best appreciated by considering how lacking in such criticism the period would have been without them.

The most valuable book is the Memoirs, for it has been the basis of almost all subsequent biographical study. Since the main objective was to give the hitherto unknown, or unpublished facts concerning the life of Jane Austen, it is no real cause for wonder that there is very little of a critical nature.

Sarah Tytler 's Jane Austen and Her Work,<sup>4</sup> has, as the name implies, two divisions. The first is biographical; the second gives an account of each book, sometimes in Jane Austen's words, with a running commentary, but generally in the author's own words, paraphrasing the original in such a manner as to spoil the symmetry of the work, and to destroy much of the beauty of the literary structure.

Mrs. Charles Malden's book appears to have been written for those who do not know Jane Austen.<sup>5</sup> Here again there is a rehearsal of the plots of the novels, a mistake according to one reviewer since, "no one but Jane Austen will ever make a convert to her genius."<sup>6</sup>

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4 Sarah Tytler. Jane Austen and Her Works. Cassell, Pelter, Golpin & Co., London, 1880.

5 Malden, Op. cit.

6 Spectator. Vol. 63, p. 81.

Though uneven in quality, parts of the book are remarkably acute. She is one of the first to note the plot weaknesses in Sense and Sensibility pointing out that the action is too rapid, and that there is a want of dexterity in getting the characters out of their difficulties. She observes too that Colonel Brandon is too shadowy to be interesting, and Margaret Dashwood, the third sister, is an absolute nonentity.<sup>7</sup>

A touch of the Victorian attitude appears in her objection to Lydia's elopement in Pride and Prejudice.

It is a disagreeable incident, told too much in detail, and made needlessly prominent. It is intended to bring Wickham's baseness into greater relief, and to show how Darcy's love could even triumph over such a connection; but it is revolting to depict a girl of sixteen so utterly lost to all sense of decency as Lydia is, and the plot would have worked out quite well without it.<sup>8</sup>

Austin Dobson considered Professor Goldwin Smith "Miss Austen's most accomplished biographer."<sup>9</sup> The Life of Jane Austen<sup>10</sup> confines the biographical account to the first chapter, leaving the remaining eight chapters free for discussion of the novels. Whatever criticism there is, is frequently an elaboration of the pattern of the early reviews. There is some analysis of character, but the criticism seems superficial--as much by intention as by accident.

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7 Malden, Op. cit., p. 77.

8 Ibid., p. 106.

9 W.H. Pollock, Op. cit., p. 3.

10 Goldwin Smith. The Life of Jane Austen. Scott, London, 1890.



"Criticism is becoming an art of saying fine things," says Professor Smith, "and there are really no fine things to be said about Jane Austen. There is no hidden meaning in her; no philosophy beneath the surface for profound scrutiny to bring to light; nothing calling in any way for elaborate interpretation." <sup>11</sup>

He sees no difference between the early and the later novels. <sup>12</sup>

Northanger Abbey is eminently playful, but in no other respect do these, the work of a girl just out of her teens, differ from the most mature productions of the same writer. The insight into character and the tone of quiet irony and gentle cynicism, as well as the creative power, are the same. So are the minuteness of detail, the perfect finish, the quiet, limpid, unimpassioned style, which never interposes the writer between the reader and the subject. <sup>13</sup>

He misses the universality in the characters, for

...as they all come before us...we feel that they, their lives and loves, their little intrigues, their petty quarrels, and their drawing-room adventures are the lightest of bubbles on the great stream of existence. <sup>14</sup>

Oscar Fay Adams, one of the first American Austenites makes no critical claims. His book <sup>15</sup> is professedly a biography, and as such contains only such critical utterances as were compatible with the scope of the work. These occasional comments show such a fine critical acumen,

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11 Smith, Op. cit., p. 183.

12 Ibid., p. 186.

13 Ibid., p. 33.

14 Ibid., p. 191.

15 Oscar Fay Adams. Story of Jane Austen's Life. A.C. Mc Clurg & Co., Chicago, 1891.

however, that one wishes Mr. Adams had confined his endeavors to that field. Quoting from one of the letters to Cassandra, in which Jane Austen suggests ironically that her work should be padded with "some solemn specious nonsense", Adams calls attention to her real feeling respecting matters of style, a feeling which

never allowed her to indulge in digressions in the course of her novels, which consequently present, perhaps, the finest instances of unimpeded direct narration in the whole range of English fiction. 16

Superlatives destroy, and though it is difficult to find fault with the above statement, one is not so willing to accept others to which Adams' enthusiasm leads him. One questions the accuracy of "Never did an author obtrude so little of his or her personality in print as Miss Austen. She never stood at one side and gossiped with her audience about the people on her stage." 17

Admitting that her great power of characterization lay in permitting the personalities to reveal themselves, there is more than one occasion when Jane Austen was not above nudging the reader. 18

Shakespeare is again called upon to provide a comparison, unconvincing, in spite of the fact that it is conditional.

W.H. Pollock's book was the first, as has been pointed out, dedicated entirely to a study of the novels themselves, and only to Jane Austen's life in so far as it elucidates the works. Opening his

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16 Ibid., p. 160.

17 Ibid., p. 242.

18 Vide: Pride and Prejudice, pp. 4-5; Emma, ch. 1.

study with a brief survey of the field, Pollock picks up "one or two  
little threads in Goldwin Smith's...volume"<sup>19</sup> and several slips in  
Oscar Adams' Life,<sup>20</sup> which, though of no great intrinsic importance, are  
worth the elucidation given. The book contains much careful study, but  
there is a tendency throughout blindly to follow the paths blazed by the  
earlier critics, and to sum up their claims for Jane Austen. He repeats<sup>21</sup>  
the Shakespearean comparison, paraphrasing it for four pages.<sup>21</sup>

Chapters four to six emphasize the similarity between the writings  
of Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Miss Ferrier, and their more  
famous contemporary; and although admitting that there are not such  
glaring defects in the latter as can be found in the first three  
authors,<sup>22</sup> one gains the impression that Professor Pollock is  
convinced that in order of merit they lag not far behind.

<sup>23</sup>  
Though he discriminates theoretically between criticisms and  
opinion, there is very little of such distinction in the statements made,  
and the work fails as a competent critical study.

Critical utterances on Jane Austen in the Histories of Literature,  
and volumes of Essays, were comparatively few, and showed, like the  
books considered, no steady progressions in ideas. The Histories were,  
for the most part, primarily interested in biographical data, and only

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19 Pollock, Op. cit., pp. 3-4.

20 Ibid., pp. 10-11.

21 Ibid., pp. 28-31.

22 Ibid., pp. 32-67.

23 Ibid., p. 114.

only occasionally commented on the novels themselves. Too frequently these comments served as carriers for the editor's likes and dislikes, as when Julia Kavanagh dogmatizes.

Miss Austen, however, though she displayed and adopted the pictorial method, is not an effective writer. Her stories are moderately interesting. Her heroes and heroines are not such as charm away our hearts or fascinate our judgment...Every year sees the birth of works of fiction that prove her deficiencies...she has remained unequalled in her region--a wide one, the region of the commonplace. 24

Emerson voiced his opinion still more vehemently when in 1861 he wrote:

I am at a loss to understand why people hold Miss Austen's novels at so high a rate. They seem to me vulgar in tone, sterile in artistic invention, imprisoned in the wretched convention of the English society, without genius, wit or knowledge of the world. Never was life so pinched and narrow. The one problem in the mind of the writer in both the stories I have read, Persuasion and Pride and Prejudice, is marriageableness. 25

Mrs. Oliphant either had no knowledge of sources or wilfully  
26  
ignored them. In spite of contrary evidence in the Memoir, she claims that Pride and Prejudice was kept in manuscript for ten years because of the "feeling on the part of the parents of Jane Austen that publishing a

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- 24 Julia Kavanagh. "Miss Austen's Six Novels", English Women of Letters.  
Bernard Tauchnitz, Leipzig, 1862, p. 252.  
25 "Business and Marriage", Scribner, Vol. 55, p. 531.  
26 J. Austen-Leigh. Memoirs, p. 97.

book would be something of a stigma on their young daughter." <sup>27</sup>

Equally unreliable is Sir Francis Doyle whose gossipy Reminiscences  
and Opinions were the source of at least one fabulous version of Jane  
Austen's romance, <sup>28</sup> as well as the heresy of Elizabeth Bennet's  
vulgarity. <sup>29</sup>

Walter Raleigh, generally a sane and discriminating critic permits  
his enthusiasm to ride him in his reference to Jane Austen, <sup>30</sup> and  
W.D. Howells is completely carried away by his devotion to his "divine  
Jane." <sup>31</sup> "Her first novel is as completely modelled and perfectly life-  
like as her last," insists Raleigh, <sup>32</sup> while Howells is equally emphatic  
that "Jane Austen was the first and the last of the English novelists  
to treat material with entire truthfulness." <sup>33</sup>

The first volume of Letters <sup>34</sup> was edited with an introduction and  
critical remarks by Lord Brabourne, but his notes are more chatty than  
informative. They manifest likewise, the tendency of criticism in his  
day toward universal applause, and a disposition toward an elaborate  
veiling of adverse opinion behind effeminate phrases. <sup>35</sup> There is also a

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- 27 Mrs. M.O. Oliphant. The Literary History of England. Vol. 3,  
Macmillan & Co., London, 1882, p. 226.
- 28 Sir Francis Doyle. Reminiscences and Opinions. Fleming Revell,  
London, 1886, pp. 356-7.
- 29 Ibid., p. 345
- 30 Walter Raleigh. The English Novel. J.M. Dent, London, 1913,  
pp. 263-286.
- 31 W.D. Howells. Criticism and Fiction. Harper, New York, 1892,  
pp. 73-77.
- 32 Raleigh, Op. cit., p. 266.
- 33 Howells, Op. cit., p. 73.
- 34 Jane Austen. Letters. Bentley, London, 1884.
- 35 Caine, Op. cit., intro. p. xxii.

manifest frankness which is disarming, but not the stuff of criticism. An example may illustrate:

I frankly confess that I never could endure Mr. Knightly. He interfered too much; he judged other people rather too quickly and too harshly; he was too old for Emma and being the elder brother of her elder sister's husband, there was something incongruous in the match which I could never bring myself to approve. 36

The lack of any consistent criticism or tolerably objective attitudes in the books considered was not confined to students of Jane Austen, but was in part, the reflection of the critical canons of the period.

George Saintsbury contends that the singular decadence of English criticism in the middle third of the century was a result of the very lawlessness and rulelessness by which the critics had freed themselves from what they considered the shackles of classicism.<sup>37</sup> Their creed, had they formulated one, would have contained some, if not all of the following articles:

1. The first requisite of the critic is that he should be capable of receiving impressions; the second that he should be able to express and impart them.
2. The object of literature is Delight; its soul is Imagination; its body is Style. A man should like what he does like and his likings are facts in criticism for him.

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36 Letters, p. 89.

37 George Saintsbury. History of Criticism and Literary Taste, Vol.3. p. 412.

38 Ibid., p. 409.

3. Good sense is a good thing, but <sup>39</sup>may be too much regarded:  
nonsense is not necessarily bad.

While it is true that some of the rules that the 19th century critics threw off were irrational, inadequate and irrelevant, requiring to be applied with all sorts of provisos, they had, at any rate, kept criticism methodical and tolerably sure in its utterances. 40

An examination of the periodical literature dealing with Jane Austen reveals a parallel disregard of objective facts or analysis based upon a unity of concept regarding prose fiction. There is no broad outlook dealing with the author's technique as the means for securing effectiveness; there is no single definite point of view; on the contrary there are a multiplicity of opinions on any one issue, each upheld with conviction and persuasiveness if not with reason.

During the nineteenth century, especially during the latter half, the periodical press began to assume the duty of guiding public opinion 41  
in the formation of principles of judgment in literature.

It is not surprising then to find that fifty-six magazines contained articles on Jane Austen from 1850-1900, and that the majority of these were reprinted. It would be interesting to know whether the frequency of the editions appearing during this period was due in any part to the publicity afforded by the periodicals, or

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39 Ibid., p. 410.

40 Ibid., p. 412.

41 Caine, Op. cit., p. xv.

whether the articles were written in deference to the public taste.

There is as great a variety in the subjects handled as in the attitudes, and in several cases the reader finds considerable difficulty in disentangling Jane Austen from the extraneous matter. Though the 20th century can still show the species of critic who "struts up and down the lines of his column, displaying his knowledge and his theories" <sup>42</sup> the 19th century had a plethora. An outstanding example of this kind of rambling review is that by Mrs. Thackeray Ritchie. <sup>43</sup> Calling attention to the fact that Jane Austen's characters are always prepared for company, "Miss Edward's curl papers are almost the only approach to dishabille in her stories", <sup>44</sup> she finds it not too far beside the point to say:

What a difficult thing it would be to sit down and try to enumerate the different influences by which our lives have been affected--influences of other lives, of nature, of place and circumstances, of beautiful sights passing before our eyes, or painful ones; seasons following in their course, hills rising on the horizons, scenes of ruin and desolation, in crowded thoroughfares sounds in our ears, calling, warning, encouraging, our preachers complaining and asking our pity...

Lookins at oneself not as oneself but as an abstract human being, one is lost in wonder at the vast complexities which have been brought to bear upon it; lost in wonder and in disappointment perhaps at the discordant result of so great a harmony. <sup>45</sup>

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42 Otto Eisenschiml. Reviewers Reviewed, p. 15.

43 Mrs. Thackeray Ritchie. "Jane Austen", Cornhill Magazine, Vol. 24, pp. 158-174.

44 Ibid., p. 163.

45 Ibid., p. 166.



and on and on, for two more pages.

There is a consistent effort to assign Jane Austen a position in literature, with the ever recurring comparison to Shakespeare. An unsigned article in Blackwoods believes that "like Shakespeare, she makes her very noodles inexhaustibly amusing, yet accurately real."<sup>46</sup>

But the comparisons do not rest there. The same article continues, "We venture to say that the only names we can place above Miss Austen in economy of art are Sophocles and Moliere in Misanthrope."<sup>47</sup> Armitt contrasts Charlotte Bronte's attitude and Jane Austen's;<sup>48</sup> Kebbel, comparing her to Richardson and Fielding asserts that the only one who could have equalled her on her own ground was Addison;<sup>49</sup> and Kirk declares<sup>50</sup> that the plot of Emma is equal to any of Ben Jonson's comedies.

There is considerable disagreement, not only to her merits, but even to her popularity. Mrs. Gore believes that "Miss Austen has never been so popular as she deserved to be. Intent on fidelity of delineation, and averse to the commonplace tricks of her art, she has not in this age of literary quackery received her reward."<sup>51</sup> An unsigned article in Temple Bar corroborates her statement. Urging the publishing of a series of scenes from the works of neglected authors, the writer says,

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46 Blackwoods, Vol. 88, p. 102.

47 Ibid., p. 10.

48 Armitt, "Jane Austen and Charlotte Bronte", Modern Review, 1892, p. 396.

49 T.E.Kebbel. "Jane Austen at Home", Living Age, Vol. 49, p. 683.

50 T.J.Kirk. "Jane Austen", North American Review, Vol. 77, p. 203.

51 Mrs. Gore. "Women as They Are", Edinburgh Review, Vol. 51, p. 540.

The small circle, and small it probably is, who read Fielding and Jane Austen, might resent the application of the scissors to their favorite authors, but they should be consoled with the reflection that in this way wider interest would be awakened in books now too generally neglected. 52

and the writer for the Saturday Review insists:

We have known beings erect on two legs, and having the outward semblance of men and women, and of men and women of education, who yet had not read Jane Austen. 53

Blackwoods holds that her claims have been long established, but the merit of first recognizing them belongs less to reviewers than to

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the general readers. In a later article appearing in the same

magazine it is inferred that "these are not the kind of books which

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catch the popular fancy at once, without pleasing the critic. A

writer for the Spectator believes that if her works were to be blotted

from the memory of men, those who really love her would lose a very

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sensible proportion of their intellectual resources.

Contending that she writes only for the elect E. Edleman states

that "Jane Austen is known today as the critic's novelist...and

Cardinal Newman considered her style so perfect that to improve his own

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he read her works through yearly."

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52 Temple Bar, Vol. 64, p. 364.

53 Saturday Review of Literature, Vol. 54, p. 828.

54 Blackwoods, Vol. 86, 1859, p. 99

55 Ibid., 1870, p. 304.

56 Spectator, Vol. 57, p. 1483.

57 E. Edleman, "Girls' Opinion on Jane Austen", Temple Bar, March, 1882, p. 344.

The majority of critics discuss her eminence in characterization, but a study of the periodicals does not reveal a single instance of any attempt at analysis of that superiority. Attention is drawn to her skill in creation, but there the matter is allowed to rest.

Other authors have given us the same characters in different scenes; she gives us the same general scenes, but the characters are always different. The silly chatter of Mr. John Thorpe is as unique in its way as the rattle of Miss Bates. Mr. Collins and Mr. Elton both marry for money, and both propose to a lady who has not the least intention of accepting them; but the formal pomposity of the one is not in the least like the pushing vanity of the other. 58

There is an emphasis on types:

Lady Catherine de Burgh and the housekeeper at Pemberly, conventional types of the heaven above and the abyss below are the only breaks which Miss Austen ever permits herself upon the level of her squirearchy. 59

The background is full, not of villians, but of fools, out of the midst of whom the heroes and heroines rise in all their glory of superior talents and elevated characters. 60

There is an interpretation of temperaments:

There is less wickedness in her novels, but there is a great deal of meanness. Even in her latest work, Persuasion, which has dignity, tenderness and sweetness far beyond any of the

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58 Temple Bar, Vol. 64, March 1882, p. 361.

59 Blackwoods, March, 1870, "Miss Austen and Miss Mitford", p. 294.

60 Ibid.

preceding five novels, meanness abounds. Sir Walter Elliott who is a male Lady Catherine, but far more humorously drawn, is essentially mean; so is his handsome daughter Elizabeth, while her toady, Mrs. Clay, is one of the most real toadies ever put in a book, and this implies that she is one of the meanest. 61

There is the expression of personal preferences:

Fanny Price and Anne Elliot interest and sometimes irritate us; Marianne Dashwood and Emma are distinctly objectionable...the latter becomes bearable somewhere about Chapter 50, but we think on the whole that it was a pity Knightley didn't marry Miss Bates. We hope that the young lady who could describe herself as doatingly fond of music and "my friends say I am not devoid of taste," is as obsolete as the atrocities she committed in water colours, and the fringe and sofa cushions she worked in worsted and beads. 62

One keen critic might emphasize her contribution to fiction as a "return to nature in the description of individuals instead of classes or nationalities," and another elaborate the theme with:

If, as probably few will dispute, the art of the novelist be the representation of human life by means of a story; and if the truest representation effected by the least expenditure of means constitutes the highest claim of art, then we say that Miss Austen has carried the art to a point of excellence surpassing that reached by any of her rivals. 64

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61 Dublin Review, 1870, pp. 430-57.

62 E. Edlemann, Op. cit., p. 347.

63 "Miss Jane Austen", Fraser's Magazine, Vol. 61, p. 36.

64 Blackwoods, Vol. 86, p. 101.

only to have some less astute critic insist with equal vehemence, if less discrimination that:

The great deficiency in her book is a want of interest in the principal characters; it is scarcely one who enlists our sympathy, and we may say none in any of her books raises our feelings above esteem and respect. 65

It would be manifestly impossible to study Jane Austen, and to neglect her realism. The periodicals contain many and various comments upon it. Edward Bennett's objection to her limited range, 66 and W.B.S.Clymer's defense of her provinciality 67 define the boundaries, but there is a vast amount of heterogeneous material lying between.

There is considerable emphasis on her neglect of the larger issues of her day, with a variety of alleged reasons for such an omission.

It would be hard to guess from her novels, that they were written as pictures of contemporary society during one of the most stirring periods of English history. Her strength lay in exquisite description of the commonplace; she is the sacer vates of well-bred conventionality. Her own mind was just sufficiently above the minds of those with whom she is thrown to enable her to see the humor and pathos which reside in the most ordinary lives; but comedy and tragedy were beyond her scope, and she knew like all great artists the limit of her powers. 68

The note of provinciality may be regarded as constituting in itself Miss Austen's great limitation. Her novels never fail to charm us;

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65 Domestic Magazine, 1877, p. 282.

66 Edward Bennett. "Jane Austen", New Century Review, Vol. 4, p. 324.

67 W.B.S.Clymer. "A Note on Jane Austen", Scribners, Vol. 9, p. 377.

68 "Letters of Jane Austen", Athenaeum, Nov. 1884, p. 585.

they do fail to move us...We could ill spare  
the example she has given us of second rate genius  
turning its faculties to the best account. 69

Scattered through the articles, however, there are fragments of  
sound criticism. Puyster considers her style

simple and perspicuous, easy without being  
careless, concise without being curt. It is  
especially remarkable for its Saxon ring and  
freedom from obsolete words and provincialisms.  
Indeed, were it not for an occasional awkward  
use of the participle "being", and the  
perpetual inaccuracy of "two", her style might be  
pronounced entirely idiomatic and faultless. 70

In the sect of Austenians or Janites, there would probably be found  
partisans who would claim the primacy of almost every one of the novels.  
It is not surprising then, to find partisans for each, and all sustaining  
their views with more heat than reason.

Nor is it to be wondered at that her attitude toward love and her  
lovers should contain matter of interest, and should be frequently  
explained by reference to an unsubstantiated romance of her own. 71

There is a hint of a later psychoanalytic interpretation in:

Miss Austen seems to be saturated with the  
Platonic idea that the giving and receiving of  
knowledge, the active formation of another's  
character or the more passive growth under another  
guidance is the truest and strongest foundation of  
love. Pride and Prejudice, Emma, and Persuasion,  
all end with the heroes and heroines making  
comparisons of the intellectual and moral  
improvement which they have imparted to each  
other. 72

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69 R.E.N.Dodge, "Note of Provinciality", Harvard Monthly, Vol. 8, p. 155.  
70 I.M.Puyster, "Jane Austen's Novels", Examiner, Vol. 74, p. 404.  
71 Ibid., p. 419.  
72 North British Review, Vol. 52, p. 132.

The ethical aspect of her novels was questioned by some:

Now, where this topic, love, is so uniformly and protractedly debated, where this one string is so incessantly harped on, it becomes a question whether, with all her admirable qualities freely recognized, Miss Austen's writings are of that healthy type which is calculated to benefit the world. 73

and upheld by others:

Miss Austen's stories are decidedly healthy reading, and this alone, when comparing them with the works of many living authors...is a feature which we hope will induce parents to place these novels, rather than more modern ones in their daughter's hands...that they deal mainly with the vicissitudes of lovers and the chances of love is of course, as they are novels, necessary. But this necessity granted, nothing that could offend a fastidious taste is recorded. 74

Thus an examination of the periodicals shows that although the qualities of Jane Austen's literary talent were recognized by the critics, in this field as well as in the books, the critical activity of the period was of a decidedly liberal sort--concerning itself for the most part with superficial and subjective statements of a general nature.

The occasional essays into the more scientific and objective type of criticism were fragmentary, and there was little attention paid to the technique of the novelist. Jane Austen was better known at the end of the century, but scarcely better analyzed than she had been in 1850;

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73 C.T. Copeland. "Miss Austen and Miss Ferrier", Atlantic Monthly, June, 1893, p. 21.

74 A. King. Dublin Review, Vol. 93, p. 114.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE LITERARY REPUTATION OF JANE AUSTEN AS FOUND IN THE CRITICAL WORKS OF THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY

In the early part of the 20th century a critic found himself handicapped by the existing confusion as to what his function should be. Critical journals were almost non-existent. The liberalism in criticism which had given birth to impressionism in the later 19th century was still at odds with the canons of historical criticism, with its moral doctrine and social values; its ideas and traditions.<sup>1</sup>

Babbitt insisted that the great weakness of the period was its proneness to forget that "knowledge and sympathy are, after all, only the feminine virtues of the critics."<sup>2</sup>

This attitude resulted in a tendency of judgment to be swallowed up completely in sympathy and comprehension, a tendency which is only too apparent in the half dozen books on Jane Austen which appeared during the years from 1900-1920.

John H. Hubback's Jane Austen's Sailor Brothers,<sup>3</sup> is concerned solely with the maritime experiences of the Austens, and with the exception of one or two hitherto unpublished letters from Jane, has

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- 1 M. D. Zabel. "An American Critic," Poetry, No. 50, pp. 330-6.
  - 2 Irving Babbitt. "Impressionist Versus Judicial Criticism," PMLA, Vol. 21, p. 688.
  - 3 John H. Hubback. "Jane Austen's Sailor Brothers", London: 1906.



nothing to add of biographical or of critical importance.

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Constance Hill's Jane Austen, Her Home and Her Friends, need not be considered, since she frankly takes the attitude of an adorer, and offers no critical comment. Neither does she cite any that is not eulogistic.

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Mrs. Mitton's Jane Austen and Her Times might better have been entitled The Times of Jane Austen, for the emphasis has been placed upon curious facts of the 18th century, thrown together more or less at random. The writings of Jane Austen have been quoted at great length and the writings of others about her at even greater. Mrs. Mitton's occasional original comments are under-energized by reason of their subjectivity. Though a critic's taste need not be suspect, simply because it is personal, it must rest upon analysis and be supported by adequate reasons if it would carry conviction.

Mrs. Mitton's work lacks these aids. When she says, "Jane can not dispute precedence with George Eliot but must yield the palm; her characters true and admirable as they are lack that living depth which George Eliot had the power to impart,"<sup>6</sup> one is not impressed. And when she disagrees with Mr. Pollock's approbation of the perfect breeding and manners of Jane Austen's characters: "Darcy himself passes every canon

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4 Constance Hill. Jane Austen, Her Home and Her Friends. Lane, London, 1902.

5 A.E. Mitton. Jane Austen and Her Times. Methuen, London, 1905.

6 Ibid., p. 102.

of gentlemanly conduct, and the Misses Bingley, who are supposed to be of irreproachable breeding betray vulgarity and lack of courtesy in every sentence,<sup>7</sup> the argument is far from conclusive.

There is indecision in her: "Of the complete novels Pride and Prejudice is admittedly the best; there are several candidates for the second place, but the superiority of Pride and Prejudice is unquestioned,"<sup>8</sup> as well as when she says, "Perhaps Northanger Abbey may be described as the book which real Austenites appreciate most, but which the casual reader does not admire. The story is not interesting."<sup>9</sup> This indecision is due, perhaps to the fact that Mrs. Mitton borrowed heavily, but not consistently from the earlier critics.

Similar in purpose and arrangement is W.H. Helm's Jane Austen and Her Country House Comedy.<sup>10</sup> In the meagre annals of Jane Austen's career he diligently seeks for the raw material of her novels, and from the novels in turn, deduces the realities of her personal experience. Collateral subjects, as dress, food, amusements, and social distinctions of the period are used to illustrate his remarks. In short, most of what Helm says has been carried over from the work of other writers.

Twelve years intervened between Helm's frankly laudatory study and Oscar Firkins' depreciation,<sup>11</sup> and in the interim a type of

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7 Ibid., p. 92.

8 Ibid., p. 99.

9 Ibid., p. 193.

10 W.M.Helm. Jane Austen and Her Country House Comedy. Nash, London, 1908.

11 Oscar W. Firkins. Jane Austen. Holt, New York, 1920.

debunking became one of the critical modes of procedure. Oscar Firkin's book is definitely of this type. It is a critical and biographical study of Jane Austen, falling into three parts. Part I is a searching and unsparing analysis of the six novels, with particular reference to plot. Part II is a more brief and general treatment of the characters, and Part III is the biographical section, a study of Miss Austen's personality as revealed in her letters, and reflected in the novels.

Whatever the faults of the book, and they are many, one feels throughout that here, at last, is one who has looked at Jane Austen more through his own eyes and less through the eyes of her many illustrious eulogists. Even though Firkins' arguments are frequently as specious as those who oppose his view, his microscopic literal measurements are challenging, and suggestive, as for example, when he calls attention to the frequency of coincidence as a method for the working out of the plot.

Miss Austen is unable or unwilling to dispense with the friendly offices of coincidence. Coincidence had not in her day fallen into that sere and yellow leaf to which the frost of latter-day criticism has reduced the green of its abundant foliage. In this novel Mr. Robert Ferrars is seen by chance in a jeweler's shop. Mr. John Dashwood is seen, equally by chance, in the same place. Edward and Lucy call on Elinor by chance at the same time. The encounter of the man servant with Lucy Ferrars at Exeter is one of those alms of destiny to which the poverty of novelists is perennially grateful. 12

Firkins revels in destroying the claims made by the Austenites.

Scott is thought to be impromptu and swashing in comparison with Miss Austen, but compare the shading in the character of the compromised and fugitive Effie Deans with Miss Austen's big bow-wow portrayal of Lydia Bennet. 13

Writing especially of Mansfield Park, he says:

Mansfield Park is a combination of two genera: it is a biography, the biography of Fanny Price, and it is a novel, the novel, roughly speaking, of the Betrams and the Crawfords. Now biography, even in the most artistic hands, is congenitally loose, and Miss Austen, though skilful, is not punctiliously skilful. Naturally enough, she has not succeeded in tucking all the loose ends and ravellings of the biography into the compact parcel of the novel. For example, Mrs. Norris' services to the plot are virtually over, after the first few chapters in which her mendicant benevolence--it deserves no better phrase--brings Fanny Price to Mansfield. After that she is installed as a permanent incumbrance in the biography, while her relation to the novel is merely that of a spectator or invader. 14

The majority of critics have been unanimous in praise of Jane Austen's characterizations. Firkins affects to find faults in the creation and ultimate effectiveness of nearly all of them. For example:

Mrs. Norris, like Lady Betram, belongs to what might be called the single-stroke type of character. She is shrewish and she is stingy, and the delineation consists of little else than the defiling past the reader's mind of successive illustrations of these major traits. Mrs. Norris has been cited as proof of the alleged complexity of Miss Austen's delineations, but I think she offers no ground for serious discomfort to supporters of the thesis that Miss Austen is anything but complex. 15

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13 Ibid., p. 36.

14 Ibid., p. 74.

15 Ibid., p. 86.

Mr. Darcy, the problem of the book, is also its failure. He is neither firmly drawn nor clearly understood. A really estimable character is to appear intolerable throughout the first half of a book, and to reveal a climax of virtue in the last half. The condition of success in this adventure is that no offense shall be specified in the premises which cannot be forgiven as venial or explained as illusory in the conclusion. Miss Austen is too fond of violent coloring to serve this rule. Darcy is merely the shell of a character, and the two lips of the shell will not meet. 16

Miss Bates' hand, if touched would be warm--pudgy, if you insist, but warm; and there is hardly another specimen of the handiwork of her creator of whom the same thing could be securely said. 17

Charles Harville, who enters the story under the disadvantage of being called "a gentleman", never recovers from this initial bruise. 18

Firkins finds fault with the narrowness of her scope, and complains that when this weakness in character, is combined with conspicuous feebleness in plot, the secondary place of Miss Austen's work is unmistakable. 19

His independence has led him to detect unmistakable weaknesses, but the levity and exaggeration of his style frequently render the observation worthless. The following few examples will serve as confirmation. Discussing Mansfield Park:

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- 16 Ibid., p. 37.  
17 Ibid., p. 109.  
18 Ibid., p. 126.  
19 Ibid., p. 129.

We all think that Miss Austen's mind was strong, if matched with Miss Burney's, and herculean in comparison with Mrs. Radcliffe's; but not Evelina in the novel she names, not Emily in the mysteries of Udolpho, is more fondled and coddled on the score of nervousness than Fanny under the wing of the robust authoress of Mansfield Park. 20

One of those sicknesses which flourish in the third volumes of novels, with a view to the inducement of repentance in the hero, or relenting in the heroine, waylays Tom Bertram; a moral convalescence accompanies the physical, which Miss Austen, whose respect for truth is highly variable, prolongs beyond the date of recovery. 21

and Emma:

Now this clergyman's wife is a woman with rings on her fingers and bells on her toes... and with the jingle of these trinkets she is deputed to amuse the reader in the slumber or suspension of the other interests. The expedient is not artful; but in the act of drowning one clutches at Mrs. Eltons, as at other straws. 22

and finally Northanger Abbey:

Now John Thorpe's bluster hardly imposes on the artless Catherine, whose ignorance at eighteen is abysmal; General Tilney is a man of the world: yet in a matter vital to his interest General Tilney reposes implicit confidence in the word of a stranger whose blackguardism is vociferous. 23

Firkins' criticism on the whole, is a compilation of captious and perverse judgments. His style is breezy, and he is frequently clever, but many of the more heretical opinions appear to exist merely for the sake of saying something new.

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20 Ibid., p. 80.

21 Ibid., p. 83.

22 Ibid., p. 98.

23 Ibid., p. 56.

Of the few essays which appeared during the early part of the 20th century, that by A.C. Bradley was the most significant, but even he suffers from the critical confusion of the era. All of the essays are short; the longest, which gives a synopsis of each of the six novels, covers only forty-eight pages. Biography and eulogy were the two professed objectives of most of the writers, and those of a critical order are frequently mere repetitions of earlier pronouncements. There is a recurrent emphasis on previously discussed phases of the novels: plot, realism, character study, and love, with mildly supported claims for preeminence. There is the ever-present, though slightly modified comparison to Shakespeare.

There is an apparent reluctance to investigate, and a timidity in making statements, though occasionally a personal enthusiasm will insert a preference in an otherwise wary article.

The Cambridge History of Literature is betrayed into "She has notable success in the character of Henry Crawford, an example of male portraiture that has never been equalled by a woman writer."<sup>24</sup>

The arguments used in assigning a masterpiece are as undocumented as those of the preceding generation:

Although Pride and Prejudice is the novel which in the mind of the public is most intimately associated with Miss Austen's name, both Mansfield Park, and Emma are finer achievements...at once riper and richer, and more elaborate...Entirely satisfactory as is Pride and Prejudice, so far as it goes, it is

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24 Cambridge History of Literature, Vol. 1, p. 239.

thin beside the niceness and analysis of motives in Emma, and the wonderful management of two housefuls of young lovers that is exhibited in Mansfield Park. 25

In Pride and Prejudice, there seemed to be hardly anything for which she need apologize. Here everything is complete: the humans, though brilliant, are always subordinate to the progress of the story; the plot is inevitable, and its turning point, (the first proposal of Darcy), occurs exactly when it ought; while all fear of a commonplace ending is avoided by the insertion of the celebrated interview between Lady Catherine and Elizabeth. 26

Bonnell makes a fine point when, discussing the charge of narrowness, he infers that:

It is the business of discriminating criticism to distinguish between positive faults and those negations which are incidental to a given manner. A negation is not a fault. We ought not to expect large treatments and big canvases of a genius whose forte is evidently the two inches wide of ivory. 27

Following in his lead Dawson agrees, and adds further that "the very limitation of her range of vision explains its intensity." 28

Limited though they necessarily are, these briefer sketches attempt a more serious study than had appeared up to that time. Somewhat of the rigid formality which would classify and label literature as to genera and species appears in several of the articles. Child would have her a

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- 25 E.V. Lucas. "Jane Austen", Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 2, p. 936.  
26 W. and R.A. Austen-Leigh. Life and Letters of Jane Austen. Smith, Elder & Co., London, 1913, p. 24.  
27 H.H. Bonnell. Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, Jane Austen. Longmans, Green, New York, 1902, p. 380.  
28 W.J. Dawson. "Jane Austen, and the Novel of Social Comedy", Makers of English Fiction. Fleming Revell, London, 1905, p. 44.



realist, since he is of the opinion that her fiction belongs to the movement toward naturalism and the study of common life and character without intervention or intrusion of the romantic and the heroic.<sup>29</sup>

Bonnell draws attention to her classicism and cites Gifford as authority.

The evenness of manner; the lightness of touch, the unruffled temper, the freedom from exaggeration, the uniform fineness, the writing, all unconscious, as if a French Academy were watching her; all this would delight a critic like Gifford whose devotion to the classical ideal was negatively not upset by any revolutionary thoughts in the perusal of Miss Austen's fiction, and was positively stimulated by such perfection of form disclosing the completeness of natural method. 30

V. Rendall, who agrees with this classification, finds an explanation for it.

The assiduous reader will not find much of this classical style about nowadays, but it flourishes in the Oxford magazine. Jane Austen, in fact, wrote Oxford style. We have only meagre details of her education, but we know that her father was an Oxford Fellow, was known as the handsome Proctor, and had a house full of pupils, presumably going or gone to Oxford. He married the daughter of a Fellow of All Souls, whose elder brother was famous in his day as the witty Master of Balliol...

Jane Austen had listened to these pupils... such a heredity and such an environment counted for more, I suggest, in the writings of Jane Austen than the obvious example of Miss Burney or Richardson, whose prolixity she happily did not follow. 31

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29 Harold Child. "Jane Austen", Cambridge History of Literature, p. 231.  
30 Bonnell, Op. cit., p. 374.  
31 V. Rendall, "English of Jane Austen", Living Age, Vol. 290, p. 381.

Swinerton would have her to be a novelist of manners, qualifying the term so that it refers not merely to a portrayal of customs and retailing chatter, but the illustration of adversities of human character as they were known to her. Upon that fabric of common human nature which she shared with the rest of her species, she raised this highly simplified, and if you like, conventionalized novel of hers. "But she did all this deliberately. She was not the naive child or the observant young woman spinning innocuous tales about her own acquaintances. She was the conscious and profound artist."

A new awareness to the subtleties of overtones had eliminated the old objection to her portraiture as inadequate representations of the age. W.D. Howells can see in the caricatures of Lady Catherine and Lady Dalrymple "the revolt against the arrogance of rank which makes itself felt more or less in all the novels" and believes that it might have been something that she "inhaled with the stormy air of the time, and respired again with the unconsciousness of breathing."

The older critics read superficially, and with Emerson saw love and marriage as the motif of all her stories. Bradford, recollecting that she was that anomaly, "a contented spinster", remarks succinctly:

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32 Frank Swinerton, Athenaeum, Sept. 1919, p. 908.

33 W. D. Howells. Heroines of Fiction, p. 49.

34 Ibid.

I do not know whether she read La Rochefoucauld. She hardly needed to. In any case she well supports his dictum that there are comfortable marriages, but no delicious ones. The motive of most she lashes with her whip of silken scorn. 35

The interpretation of her characters shows a new willingness, which while daring to delve, did not dare enough. Some suggestions are made, tempting in the light cast upon her character by the new edition of the Letters.<sup>36</sup> Bradford strikes a new note:

Obviously Miss Austen's mocking was not all sweet, sunny, natural gaiety. It had too much ill-nature in it. This shows, I think, in her fundamental conception of character. Read over her list of dramatic personae, and see how many are attractive or agreeable. It is not that she presents set types of evil or folly. Far from it. Her people are all human, vividly human, walking figures of flesh and blood humanity. But like all true human beings, they have good and evil both, and her vision usually turns toward the evil, the mildly evil, the foolish and ridiculous. This perversion is slight, but constant, and its very slowness makes it more true, and more depressing. 37

Squire does not believe that she could draw women but not men. Her subsidiary men, he insists are as good as her subsidiary women; it is her heroes that are shadowy and unsatisfactory, compared with her heroines.<sup>38</sup>

Lynd finds fault with those who see realism in her characters.

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- 35 Gamaliel Bradford. Portraits of Women. Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1924, p. 48.  
36 Austen, Letters.  
37 Bradford, Op. cit., p. 51.  
38 J.C.Squire. "Jane Austen's Centenary", Life and Letters. Hodder and Stoughton, p. 136.

Jane Austen has often been praised as a natural historian. She is a naturalist among tame animals. She does not study man as Dostoevsky does in his wild state before he has been domesticated. Her men and women are essentially men and women of the fire-side...Nor is Jane Austen entirely a realist in her treatment even of these. She idealizes them to the point of making most of them good looking, and she hates poverty to such a degree that she seldom can endure to write about any body who is poor. 39

Genteel W.L.Phelps makes excuses for the lack of emotional heights in the characters by declaring that

...to say that Elizabeth Bennet, Darcy, Knightly, Captain Wentworth, Fanny Price and Anne Elliott, lack passion because we know that not one of them would have sacrificed a principle for its enjoyment is to make the old error of assuming that only those persons have passions who are unable to control them. 40

Criticism which appeared in the periodicals suffered from the blight of the age. Two attitudes ruled the critics; a tendency to pontificate solemnly the dictum of former critics, or to damn with sweeping gesture any artist upon whom tradition had bestowed the laurel. Toward the end of the decade there was a forecasting of the new spirit of criticism in the work of Reginald Farrer,<sup>41</sup> but on the whole the work done for the magazines was on a par with that which appeared in books.

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39 Robert Lynd. "Jane Austen, Natural Historian", Old and New Masters, T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1919, p. 17.

40 W.L.Phelps, "Jane Austen", Essays on Books. Macmillan, New York, 1914, p. 129.

41 Farrer, Op. cit. pp. 1-40.

A.C.Benson, W. Moberly, and Rev. Montague Summers put old wine

in new bottles. Greenstet and an unknown writer for the Educational  
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Review reasserted with impressive parallels, the claims of Jane Austen

as an artist. Says Greenstet:

There is, in the work of Jane Austen, as in  
Sappho, the most unquestioned genius of her sex, I  
know not what of personal seductiveness and charm. 46

It is not indeed wholly fanciful to affirm that  
the relations of Jane Austen to the romance of  
sensitivity is very much the same as that of Cervantes  
to the books of chivalry or of Heine to German  
romanticism. She is at once its satirist, and its  
best exponent; her work is its apotheosis and  
siderealization. 47

and the unknown critic is scarcely less generous.

The time has surely come, when there is no need to  
bring witnesses to prove Jane Austen's fame. Arrange  
the great English novelists as one will, it does not  
seem possible to bring them out in any order where she  
is not first, or second, or third, whoever her companions  
may be. 48

Chesterton can not be called an imitator, but his comments on

Northanger Abbey and Emma, though original, are not literary criticism,

but might be called more properly, historical and social criticism,

since through them he manages to convey his scorn both for the Reformation

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42 A.C. Benson. "Jane Austen at Lyme Regis," Putnams, 1909, pp. 206-13.

43 W. Moberly. "Jane Austen", Dublin Review, Vol. 155, pp. 153-69.

44 Rev. Montague Summers. "Jane Austen", TRSL, Vol. 36, pp. 1-33.

45 Educational Review, Vol. 54, pp. 288-9.

46 Greenstet, Op. cit., p. 55.

47 Ibid., p. 559.

48 Educational Review, loc. cit., p. 288.

which had destroyed Northanger "Abbey" and the modern social service  
worker whom he sees as the evolution of Emma. <sup>49</sup>

W.F.Lord, <sup>50</sup> and A. Gladstone, <sup>51</sup> engage in a tourney of words in  
which Jane Austen is more or less lost.

The first ray of the scientific approach to criticism shines in a  
short article on Jane Austen by Alan D. Mc Killop, <sup>52</sup> in which he gives  
quotations from literary reviews of the 1790's on the list of horrid  
books which Isabella Thorpe read to Catherine Moreland in Northanger  
Abbey, chapter 6.

Reginald Farrer in the Centennial essay for the Quarterly Review <sup>53</sup>  
in 1917 did a fine bit of appreciative criticism. The analysis of  
each of the plots of the novels is especially good; but his space is  
too limited to permit an adequate evaluation or study.

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- 49 G.K.Chesterton. "Evolution of Emma", Living Age, Vol. 294, pp.502-5.  
50 W.F.Lord. "Jane Austen's Novels", 19th Century, Vol. 52, pp. 113-21.  
51 A. Gladstone. "Another View of Jane Austen", 19th Century, 1903,  
pp. 604 ff.  
52 Alan D. Mc Killop. "Jane Austen's Gothic Titles", Notes and Queries,  
Vol. 5, pp. 361-2.  
53 Farrer, Op. cit.

## CHAPTER IV

### JANE AUSTEN AND MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

The last two decades have seen the development of an interest in criticism. A new group of critics, dissatisfied with the sterility of thought, "the combination of heavy-handed literary writing, and belaboring of platitudinous and even meaningless distinctions"<sup>1</sup> which ran through much of so-called criticism, formulated new norms. It was not to be expected, perhaps, that there would be any unity of opinion as to what constitutes the function of the critic, nor was there any.

Charles I. Glicksbergon<sup>2</sup> lists seven theories--the biographical, the Crocean, the psychoanalytic, impressionism, aestheticism, the criticism of ideas mediated through art, moral with the humanist, and sociological with the Marxist.

I.A. Richards<sup>3</sup> contends that critical equipment is not primarily philosophical, but is rather a command of the methods of general linguistic analysis. Glicksbergon insists that criticism reduces itself to a question of the philosophy of life held by the critic. This philosophy is implicit in his judgment and embodied in the literary values he advocates. His philosophy in turn is conditioned largely by his temperament. Thus the method employed by the critic is often

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1 Arthur Mizener, "Recent Criticism", Southern Review, Vol. 5, p. 386.

2 Charles I. Glicksbergon, "Carl Van Doren", Sewanee Review, Vol. 46, p. 225.

3 Mizener, Op. cit., p. 394.

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subjective in origin and import, however objectively it is stated.

Carl Van Doren would have the critic find the fundamental clue to the work, to trace it home, to explain it, and then stop without venturing to portion out praise or blame.

5

Some, like Swinnerton infer that criticism is the study of a production in relation to the writer's period, environment and purpose. Aldous Huxley, in a fine and very angry article condemns the absurd pseudo-scientific research which hopelessly mixes the scientifically treatable, non-literary and non-artistic aspects of literature with their purely artistic aspect.

6

Although outstanding critical work has appeared since the early 20's the greater interest has been in poetry, and to date no rounded comprehensive book of criticism of Jane Austen's work has been produced.

7

Leonie Villard's New Study of Jane Austen, will not be considered because it is a translation of the French Jane Austen Sa Vie et Son Oeuvre, and as such falls outside the scope of this study. The New Study of Jane Austen, by R. Brimly Johnson, bound in one volume with Mlle. Villard's book begins with the unqualified statement that

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4 Glicksbergon, Op. cit., p. 234.

5 Ibid., p. 234.

6 Frank Swinnerton, "The Art of the Novel", Bookman, Vol. 50, p. 414.

7 Aldous Huxley, "Literature and Examinations", Southern Review, Vol. 1, p. 102.

8 Leonie Villard. New Study of Jane Austen. Routledge & Sons, London, 1924.

9 Leonie Villard. Jane Austen, Sa Vie et Son Oeuvre. Saint Etienne, Paris, 1914.

10 Johnson, Copy with Villard's New Study of Jane Austen.



There have been two assumptions always made about Jane Austen--the foundation from which all criticism or appreciations has been established:

1. That she was exceptionally modern in her realism; observer and showman, whose work was based on the study of human nature.
2. That no writer of equal genius ever owed so little to her predecessors; knew or cared so little about books. 11

Having set up these straw men Johnson proceeds to demolish them by insisting that:

She wrote books because she loved books and for no other reason. She did not study human nature but loved men and women, and her realism sprang from loyalty to her friends. 12

While it is obvious enough that all students of Jane Austen were not divided into the two camps assigned by Johnson, it is equally obvious that Jane Austen was not the mildly saccharine humanitarian he would make her.

As J.B.Priestley points out,

Jane Austen was no misanthrope, but a kindly, sunny tempered woman of genius; but to say that she loved men and women in the sense that, say Chaucer and Dickens loved men and women, is obvious exaggeration. She was diverted by the comedy of life, enjoyed human nature, which is a very different thing...

And further to say that her realism sprang from loyalty to her friends or from anything else is a mistake, if only for the simple reason that her realism did not exist...Dealing with manners as she does, she is naturally a guide to the

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11 Ibid., p. 4.

12 Ibid.

manners and customs of her time, and is, in her own way, a social historian in miniature. But to imagine that she gives us life as she saw it, in its entirety, is preposterous. If she is a realist, then we must assume that the beginning of the last century in Hartfordshire no one ever died a violent death, or got drunk, or...was consumed with passion...The truth is that she dealt with life as she deliberately elected to see it for the purposes of her art. She is neither romantic nor realistic; she is in the great comic tradition where she has a place of her own.

She is almost as artificial as Congreve and we can not enjoy her to the full unless we are prepared to release our hold upon the real world in much the same way that Lamb did when he approached the Restoration dramatists. 13

Johnson's interpretation of Henry Crawford is purely personal, but as such, is an interesting example of his ability to explain a defect in analysis by shifting the emphasis from Jane Austen's lack of technique to the success of her failure. Says Johnson:

Her plan for Mansfield Park was to humanize by realistic methods, the old plot of criminal characters, (mildly criminal as she would have them), disturbing a simple, domestic scene--as we find them in the Vicar of Wakefield. But carried away generously by affection for the handsome villain she had so carefully brought to life, she lends Henry Crawford a real delicacy of mind, a spontaneous appreciation of goodness, a sympathy that is whole-hearted and may I say, the seal of genuine "conversion"; after we see it towards William, Susan and Mr. Price himself.

Actually this new man who yet grew naturally out of the old, would never even have felt the small vanity that was his undoing; would certainly not have found "the temptation of immediate pleasure too strong for a mind unused to make any sacrifice

to right." Miss Austen, in fact, drags him back with artistic insincerity, to her original conception of his place in the plot. 14

An equally facile escape for a poorly conceived character is:

"Lydia can be justified or understood only if we look on Lydia as fiction made, not emotionally created; a mere "borrowed" tool to scaffold the plot." 15

Two later studies of Jane Austen show the same weaknesses--a tendency to assume that because the novelist is admirable in some things she must, of necessity be admirable to all. In Jane Austen,<sup>16</sup> he discusses manners and morals and marriage as they appear in the novels; her own reading and culture, and what is known of her life, and ends with two chapters on the six novels.

He is the first critic to take the minor works into account, and to set them in their proper place--as evidence of Jane Austen's life and character, and of the progress of her art, rather than as literature.

Archbishop Whately, who could find no definite evidence of religion in any of her books, would wonder at the ease with which Johnson discovers religious motives.

Jane Austen's morality and faith were not conventional, but instinctive. The Bertrams and Crawfords miss their way to happiness; the one by lack of moral guidance, the other from definite immoral influences; both from laxity about religion. 17

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14 Johnson, Op. cit., p. 49.

15 Ibid.

16 R. Brimley Johnson. Jane Austen. Sheed and Ward, London, 1927.

17 Ibid., p. 20.

His examination of the plot structure of Fanny Burney's Evelina and Cecilia convinces Johnson that there are close similarities between these novels and Sense and Sensibility, and Pride and Prejudice.

The third of Johnson's studies on Jane Austen<sup>18</sup> is more biographical and historical in content than the preceding books. There is some critical analysis, and a totally new and entirely unsubstantiated assignment of a purpose to all her writings.

Says Johnson:

Every writer not purely frivolous or governed by affectation sooner or later discovers within himself some undercurrent of purpose in his work, some message not pedantic or fanatical, but a matter of the deepest conviction, which in time, comes to dominate his art. Jane Austen's innermost aim and inspiration was truthful portraiture of her own sex; a determination through her own quietly effective and affectionate raillery to burst the bubble of man's complacent vanity and teach him that women had minds of their own, moral standards of their own, and a far quicker sense for character, a finer tact, stronger powers of endurance and fidelity. 19

The Watsons, according to Johnson, preceded Emma, and he believes that the air of Highbury is plainly stirring in the Watsons. His introductory comparisons are interesting, and not entirely untenable--

The first Emma's father would have his basin of gruel for supper, when the clock struck nine. There are relationships between Mrs. Robert Watson and Mrs. Elton; Weston and Mr. Edward; Tom Churchill, and Tom Musgrove. 20

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18 R. Brimley Johnson. Jane Austen, Her Life, Her Work, Her Family, and Her Critics. Dent, London, 1930.

19 Ibid., p. 76.

20 Ibid., p. 80.

but he trips himself when he asserts that Emma's

respect for Mr. Howard, hardly enough to suggest Knightley, though both were somewhat parental toward the heroine, and both hesitated before the proposal, fearful her heart was attached elsewhere. 21

Johnson seems to forget that Jane Austen did not finish The Watsons, and the proposal by Mr. Howard occurs in the story as completed by her niece, Mrs. Hubback in 1850.

Johnson's own confusion regarding Jane Austen is expressed in the several contradictions which appear in the book. Obsessed with a desire to make her perfect he justifies some of the decidedly unkind bits in her letters by claiming that

It was the author of Northanger Abbey, not Jane Austen, who found Mrs. Stent always in the way, unequal to anything, and unwelcome to everybody; and Mrs. Blount looking exactly as she did in September, with the broad face, diamond bandeau, white shoes, pink husband, and fat neck. 22

Later, apparently forgetting that he has postulated perfection unto her, he admits that there is real annoyance, not quite free from bitterness in certain phrases to Cassandra, and somewhat inconsistently concludes:

From one point of view I feel disposed to welcome such evidence of human weakness, for like Jane herself, I abhor pictures of perfection. 23

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21 Ibid., p. 80.

22 Ibid., p. 97.

23 Ibid., p. 193.

Though Johnson is frankly a Janeite, it is difficult to make his criticism a consistent whole that will show the peculiar excellence of Jane Austen as distinguished from the half a dozen other great novelists.

John Bailey is hardly more successful in his Introduction to Jane Austen,<sup>24</sup> a book containing articles which originally appeared as Prefaces to editions of her work. His critical judgments are those of preference, as when he says,

It is curious perhaps, that with Jane Austen's most perfect creation, Pride and Prejudice, we have her one absolute failure. Why she introduced Mary Bennet in the book it is difficult to say. She plays no part in the main story, and hardly any even in the minor episodes. And it is not only that she has no connection with the action, and less with the other characters: she is nothing whatever in herself, and never comes alive for a second...she is useless and even dull as a caricature, because the last vestiges of life and truth have been caricatured out of her. 25

He makes no apologies or explanations for such uncritical statements as, "Pride and Prejudice is certainly the most brilliant of the six novels,"<sup>26</sup> or, "For myself, I can not think Mansfield Park will ultimately rank even among the first three."<sup>27</sup>

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- 24 John Bailey. Introductions to Jane Austen. Oxford, London, 1931.  
25 Ibid., p. 36.  
26 Ibid., p. 33.  
27 Ibid., p. 64.

In 1906 Irving Babbitt found reason to complain that criticism tended to become first a form of history, and then a form of biography, and finally a form of gossip, until of late "it seems to be falling into its anecdotalage."<sup>28</sup> Helen Ashton's I Had A Sister,<sup>29</sup> devotes fifty-six of its 286 pages to Cassandra Austen, and is a good example of this type of writing. It contains no criticism, almost no reference to the novels, aside from the expression of the writer's belief that Anne Elliot in Persuasion is Jane Austen's monument to her sister.

Her calm and noble character appears very like Cassandra's, and when her own romance came to such a sad end, she lived up to the claim which Anne made of loving longest when existence is gone, and hope is lost. 30

31

Miss Thomson goes to the opposite extreme, and shirks nothing: the motives of the persons, the intentions of their creator, are rigorously analysed; and the analysis admits of qualification, or challenges contradiction on almost every page. For instance, in dealing with the diverting burlesque, Love and Freindship, written in its author's fifteenth year she says,

"Apart from the fact that novels written in the form of letters were then fashionable, the convention was one that was especially suited to Miss Austen's genius", and she gives reasons. Yet later on she tells us that though at first the

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28 Irving Babbitt, Op. cit., p. 688.

29 Helen Ashton. I Had A Sister. Dickson, London, 1937.

30 Ibid., p. 252.

31 C.L.Thomson. Jane Austen, A Survey. H. Marshall & Son, London, 1929.

novelist "composed her stories in the form of letters, she soon abandoned that cumbrous method."

Of Pride and Prejudice, Miss Thomson tells us that Mr. Bennet's superior attitude annoys even the reader, as in the first two chapters, but on another page she says that this novel opens with the conversation of the Bennet family about the arrival of Mr. Bingley, a beginning so brilliant that one wonders she did not employ the method more frequently. Is not the "brilliance" of the opening mainly due to the superior attitude of Mr. Bennet, which annoys even the reader?

Miss Thomson is indeed a difficult critic. She asserts that in Persuasion we too often become acquainted with the characters by the descriptions of the author, whereas in the chapter on Workmanship, she questions whether Jane Austen does not use the method of dialogue too frequently. 32

On some occasions, however, her concrete criticisms are startlingly near the truth, as, for example, when she finds fault with Fanny Price because she

conforms to the prevailing fashion in heroines. even as we have seen it defined by Diderot, sensibility was that which led its possessors "a compatir, a frissoner, a se troubler, a admirer, a pleurer, a s'evanouir, a secourir", Fanny clearly exhibited its symptoms and to our astonishment, we find Miss Austen, who had mocked at such propensities in her youth, choosing them to distinguish the heroine whom she herself, perhaps, preferred among all her creations. "My Fanny," she called her, and gave her the name of her favorite niece. 33

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32 W.H.Helm, Bookman, Vol. 78, p. 41.

33 Thomson, Op. cit., p. 152.



Her objection to critics who claim that Jane Austen did not know men is equally well pointed.

She must have known more about men than the average home-keeping woman, for she had five brothers, boy cousins, and two uncles whom she frequently visited. Her father had taken pupils who lived at the rectory; and besides these were Lefroys and Harwoods, and the Digweeds, all frequently mentioned in her letters. 34

Miss Thomson shows no reluctance to introducing her statements with "we can not tell though it is permissible to suspect from various hints",<sup>35</sup> or "we may, perhaps, be allowed to imagine,"<sup>36</sup> and the frequency with which she embellishes her book with imaginative possibilities renders it as valueless a reference as gossip ever is. Discussing Fanny Burney, she is not content that Jane should have read her books.

It may be that on one of her visits to her mother's cousin...who had married with Rev. S. Cooke, Rector of Little Bookham, she met Fanny Burney...If Miss Austen visited Mrs. Cooke in 1795 as she did later in 1813, it is safe to assume that her cousin took her to see Mme. D'Arblay. 37

Elizabeth Jenkins' Jane Austen,<sup>38</sup> is a biographical study of the author, told chronologically for the first time. Such criticism as occurs when discussing the novels is merely incidental, and though intensely readable it has little to say that has not been said before.

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34 Ibid., p. 83.

35 Ibid., p. 86.

36 Ibid., p. 134.

37 Ibid., p. 101.

38 Elizabeth Jenkins. Jane Austen, A Biography. Gollancz, London, 1938.

Her interpretation of Emma is stimulating, though it really explains nothing.

The structure of Emma not only exemplifies Jane Austen's own peculiar method of showing each character in relation to all the rest; it suggests that of a Chinese ivory ball, and has an intricacy no less complicated and distinct.

The heroine in her wrong-headed folly, spins six separate, interlacing circles of delusion. On this highly formalized base, the characters move to and fro with a naturalness that defies description...The triumph of Emma in a general sense, is perhaps, that although the plot is intricate and formal in so striking a degree, yet every phase of it springs inevitably from the characters of those concerned. 39

She shirks any attempt at analysis by explaining that there is no answer to the mystery as to why a plain statement made by Jane Austen  
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does the work of an architectural description of some one else.

Miss Jenkins is the first to point out the error of those who would see in Eliza de Feuillide the original of Mary Crawford. Jane Austen read Mansfield Park to Eliza de Feuillide's widower the year after her death, and it would be extremely unlikely that she would be guilty of such an indelicacy were there any possibility of his seeing in the  
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character of the "villainess" any similarity to his wife.

She is emphatic in her derision of those critics who think Anne Elliot must be Jane Austen, otherwise she could not know how she felt. Says Miss Jenkins:

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39 Ibid., p. 249

40 Ibid., p. 194.

41 Ibid., p. 230.

The only think that deters them from believing that Shakespeare smothered his wife in a fit of jealousy, was deeply distressed by a second marriage of his mother, murdered a distinguished guest in the hope of succeeding him in his office, and was finally turned out of doors by his ungrateful children, is that the stories of Othello, Hamlet, Macbeth and Lear were published and widely known before he undertook them. 42

43

Mary Lascelles' Jane Austen and Her Art is the most ambitious study of the author which has appeared to date. It is well documented, and carefully assembled, and there is a painstaking search for facts; but the book on the whole is vague and unsatisfying. The scholarly truths, and careful research, while valuable, lack significance of design.

44

Miss Lascelles contends that Jane Austen had but one purpose in writing, and that was satirical throughout. She was out to attack the artificial romantic burlesque character of most of the fiction of her day. Miss Lascelles defines and interprets the three types of burlesque and attempts to show how Jane Austen's work fits into all three; quoting freely from the unpublished works and incomplete fragments, such as

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Sandition and Love and Freindship.

Though the analysis is unique, and appears to bear up under the strain Miss Lascelles puts upon it; it is questionable whether conclusion can be drawn from works which Jane Austen herself considered unworthy to see the light.

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42 Ibid., pp. 79-80.

43 Lascelles, Op. cit.,

44 Ibid., p. 55.

45 Ibid., p. 57 ff.

Northanger Abbey is certainly written in a satiric vein, and so, in a measure is Sense and Sensibility. Jane's pen never quite lost its mordant tip, but as her talent grew her second purpose overshadowed the first.

She wanted to show that ordinary life could be as interesting as exaggerated fantasy, and she came to understand and sympathize with her heroes and heroines, instead of deriding them. For instance, while she certainly deemed Emma a busy-body, she would never have called her a snob as does Miss Lascelles. Class distinctions which seem so strange to us were de rigueur in village life until long after her day, and while she may have laughed at them, she loved to laugh, she would have observed them herself. 46

Miss Lascelles has taken pains to read everything Jane Austen must have read, and everything that may have helped to form her style or her notions of life and art.

She finds fault with R. Brimley Johnson's constant search for influences and sources, and ridicules the careful listing of similarities in Fanny Burney's work and Jane Austen's, on the ground that when many story-tellers occupy themselves with a social world which offers no great variety of likely action, their stories will probably resemble one another as to many of the major incidents; and if they draw on these limited resources like spendthrifts, such resemblances will be inevitable, and therefore, not significant.

Now Fanny Burney and her successors were prodigals of this kind; in their plots were to be found almost all the likely happenings of

family life among the English gentry, besides some that were not so likely. Therefore, to find an episode or turn of plot in one of Jane Austen's novels which resembles one or more of some earlier novel--even though that precursor should be one of her favourites, and prompting be as likely an explanation as coincidence--this tells us very little of what the work of that earlier novelist meant to Jane Austen; and so long as she remained content to build her plots of these major incidents, she could not but build them of material that had been used already. 47

After making this sane statement she herself falls into the same pit by attempting to see a relation between Sandition and Cowper's  
48

The Task.

She attempts the first extended analysis of Jane Austen's style, dividing the study into a consideration of her skill in narrative, and her peculiarities of diction. She sees parallels of climax in all the novels, and explains them by reference to the literary convention of her day, the convention of a climax to the action; that is, of tension first increased, then snapped, by some act more violent than any that has preceded it.

And the kinds of violent acts that would lend themselves to the novelist's hand and would appear likely in the life of an English country gentlewoman of that day were very few. Unfortunately Richardson had made it seem that, of those few, the violence of actual or attempted seduction might be the most apt and convenient for the novelist's purpose. The influence of this suggestion is seen in all of Jane Austen's novels,

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47 Lascelles, Op. cit., p. 42.

48 Ibid., pp. 45-6.

except Northanger Abbey, which shows rather impact than influence. But her response to it varies; and the variation reveals her development. 49

Miss Lascelles claims Jane Austen closed her mind against such irregularity. Willoughby's seduction of Elizabeth is quite unreal. Lydia's flight is real before and after it occurs, but the central fact is unimagined. Mansfield Park, the author hides behind Fanny.

To some, this explanation seems much too simple, and a good deal of it is almost silly. No one will pretend that Elizabeth exists, but as for Lydia's flight--

We know every thing about it; this elopement is not so much a fall from decency as a triumph of inconsiderateness. 50

The examination of the rough drafts in The Watsons and Sandition, which Miss Lascelles believes "reveal the tricks of Jane Austen's power of dialogue and diction" <sup>51</sup> is one of the finest things in the book, and, incidentally, is the first organized and scientific investigation into the magic of her language. Miss Lascelles calls attention to Austen's "steady and consistent substitution of short plain words for longer synonyms", <sup>52</sup> to her ability "to suggest social variants in speech, <sup>53</sup> by syntax and phrasing rather than by vocabulary". She submits the <sup>54</sup> "limpid confusion of Miss Bates" to a detailed examination.

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49 Ibid., p. 73.

50 New Statesman and Nation, Vol. 18, p. 620.

51 Lascelles, Op. cit., p. 99.

52 Ibid., p. 99.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid., p. 95.

She is a bit of a latitudinarian, however, when she sees only one grammatical irregularity, the dislocated clause, in Jane Austen's writing.

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On the question of creation of character she comes back to Mr. E.M. Forster's flat and round characters; those who are capable of surprising the reader she classifies as round, and those which are not, as flat.

There is nothing trivial about Miss Lascelles' study. It is extremely learned in secondary sources; and bears a solemn air of precise critical statement. In spite of this attention to facts, this ingenious fitting of sources into the framework, there is a feverishness about the book that bespeaks a too burning interest in the theme--a talking around and about it, without ever touching the heart of the matter.

56

Saintsbury's evaluation of the critical work of Macaulay:

I do not suppose that there are twenty pages of pure criticism, putting all sorts and scraps together. The extremely interesting is all frittered and whittled off into shavings of quip and crank and gibe and personality.

might well be a summary of the critical essays on Jane Austen which appeared in various collections from 1920 to 1941. Aside from Mary

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Lascelles' Some Characteristics of Jane Austen's Style, a study which was later incorporated into her book, Jane Austen, and Her Art, there was

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55 Ibid., p. 104.

56 Saintsbury, Op. cit., p. 479.

57 Mary Lascelles. "Some Characteristics of Jane Austen's Style, Essays and Studies, Vol. 22, pp. 60-85.

almost no effort at serious criticism. Polite tributes of a trivial nature, often too short to contain any but the most superficial observations, "overflow with the pious phrases of appreciation." 58

Though a number of essays are the work of critics of recognized ability, they were content, either because of lack of interest or lack of space, to give fragmentary and topical reports instead of sound critical judgments or analyses.

Schelling, for instance, who hails her as the "Queen of English Fiction," 59 limits his article to a proof of her broad-mindedness, 60 and the reassertio that she wrote no improving books for the young. 61

E.M.Forster, in his Aspects of the Novel, uses Miss Bates, Pug, and Mrs. Bertram as examples of his theory of the flat and round characters, and comes to the conclusion that "all her characters are round and capable of rotundity." 62

A.B.Walkley, one of the most enthusiastic of Janeites is content to study her piece-meal. He is enchanted with her bores, exuberant over R.W.Chamber's edition of her collected works; 63 irritated with Shiela 64

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58 Huxley, Op. cit., p. 102.

59 Felix E. Schelling. "Veritable Queen of English Fiction", Appraisements and Asperities. Lippincott, London, 1922, pp. 175-80.

60 Ibid., p. 178.

61 Ibid., p. 176.

62 E.M.Forster. Aspects of the Novel, p. 113.

63 A.B.Walkley. "Enchanting Bores", More Prejudice. Heinemann, London, 1923, p. 23.

64 Ibid., p. 18.



Kaye-Smith's cool appreciation of his idol, and certain that Persuasion is the spiritual autobiography of Jane Austen.

Wilbur Cross in his Development of the English Novel sees in Pride and Prejudice the technique of a Shakespearean comedy, but he goes to no particular effort to demonstrate his theory.

G.K.Chesterton, in a typically broad and sweeping statement alleges that

...her power came, as all power comes, from the control and direction of exuberance. But there is the presence and pressure of that vitality behind her thousand trivialities; she could have been extravagant if she liked. She was the very reverse of a starched or a starved spinster; she could have been a buffoon like the Wife of Bath if she chose. 68

A note of modern eugenics enters into Robert Morse Lovett's interpretation of what he considers the underlying theme, albeit an unconscious one in all Miss Austen's work.

She had never heard of the "will to live", or the survival of the fittest; yet her novels are all concerned with a condition fundamental to the future of families and the race, viz., the right mating of individuals. Those who interrupt this process by introducing romantic or sentimental temptations are the villains of her stories. 69

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65 Ibid., p. 25.

66 Ibid., p. 28.

67 Wilbur Cross. The Development of the English Novel. Macmillan, New York, 1908, p. 119.

68 G.K.Chesterton, in Love and Freindship, Preface, p. xv.

69 Robert M. Lovett, and Helen Sard Hughes. History of the Novel in England. Houghton Mifflin, New York, 1932, p. 171.

Virginia Moore bolster's up her own high opinion of Jane Austen's worth by quoting Katherine Mansfield's letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell.

M and I are reading Jane Austen in the evenings with delight. Emma is really a perfect book...don't you feel? I enjoy every page. I can not have enough of Miss Bates or Mr. Woodhouse's gruel, or the charming Mr. Knightley. 70

Edgar Pelham summarizes her position by mildly repeating the views of his colleagues, and by comparing her with Thackeray. 71

Elizabeth Bowen gives her impressions of the heroes of the novels, devoting the greater amount of her attention to Henry Crawford, who, she admits has a certain "beaute du diable." 72

Henry Crawford is energetic, dashing and unscrupulous. He has a certain beaute du diable. He is the most sophisticated of Jane Austen's men, and has also an excellent intellect; when he is at Mansfield Park, they have good after-dinner talk, (vide the conversation about Shakespeare). He had "moral taste", a particular aesthetic sensibility to innocence which is in keeping with his character. But moral taste is interesting; only highly civilized people and really rather morally neutral people have it: it is the stuff of James and Turgenev novels. 73

It is a surprising fact that, when even those who say they do not like Jane Austen admit her fine workmanship, critics are content to take it for granted, or let it pass as a mere technical accomplishment. 74

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70 Virginia Moore, "Jane Austen", Distinguished Women Writers. Dutton, New York, 1934, p. 102.

71 Edgar Pelham, "Austen and Thackeray", Art of the Novel. Macmillan, New York, 1933, pp. 102-16; 93-101.

72 Elizabeth Bowen, "Jane Austen", in The English Novelists. Verschoyle, ed. Chatto and Windus, London, 1936, p. 104.

73 Ibid.

74 Lascelles, Op. cit., p. 61.

## CHAPTER V

### LATER 20TH CENTURY MAGAZINES

An examination of the periodical literature of 1920-40 reveals the fact that there is no poverty of comment upon Jane Austen. On the contrary there is a notable sharpening of tools and extension of scope which, in spite of its uncertainty of direction and confusion of purpose enriches the literary criticism on Jane Austen, as it does the field of criticism in general during those years.<sup>1</sup>

Hence, though it would be absurd to say that nothing of value has been written about Jane Austen, it is nevertheless true that the work of the periodicals has been fragmentary in the extreme. Several of the articles are static, and dead, dealing only with settled problems, or enlivening ghosts for a while, in order to lay them.<sup>2</sup>

Richings<sup>3</sup> and Byrde<sup>4</sup> keep the Shakespearean comparison alive; Peter Quennell mouths the familiar platitudes about Emma and Miss Bates;<sup>5</sup> and E. Bowen enlarges on the twin orders of Elegance and Propriety which she professes to see illustrated in the novels.<sup>6</sup>

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- 1 Herbert J. Muller, "Pathways in Recent Criticism", Southern Review, Vol. 4, p. 812.
  - 2 Arthur Du Bois, "Among the Quarterlies," Sewanee Review, Vol. 46, p.244.
  - 3 R. Richings, "Joys of England's Jane", Dublin Review, Vol. 194, p. 270.
  - 4 M. Byrde, "Jane Austen", Sewanee Review, Vol. 32, p. 291.
  - 5 Peter Quennell, "Jane Austen", New Statesman, Vol. 30, pp. 461-2.
  - 6 E. Bowen, "Jane Austen, Artist on Ivory", Saturday Review of Literature, Aug. 15, 1936, pp. 3-14.

There is a certain amount of repetitious criticism, masquerading as original appreciation, under the disguise of journalized thought. Cecil Roberts, who is especially prone to indulge in this type of comment, believes that Jane Austen has been greatly overrated as to characterization, plot and dialogue. He contradicts himself immediately by conceding that her style and language are unsurpassed for their marvelous smoothness, and for the infallible servitude of perfect words to thoughts, "in a style which must fill many modern writers of the rhytmatoid-arthritis school with anger. She has no joy over the paralytics of prose; the violet and the violent ray shine not upon the objects of literary tuberculosis that turn our modern lending libraries into hospital wards."

7

Lm.M. Ragg lashes those who criticise Jane Austen's cool aloofness and detachment from the larger problems of the times, especially the Napoleonic war.

Though the mere length of the war with France must have lodged it deeply in the subconsciousness of all British subjects, it did not dislocate the structure of a mainly agricultural society. The farmers neither needed nor received injunctions to dig for victory; and though the press gangs were busy, and recruiting was accelerated, there were plenty of idle and elegant young men, Willoughbys, Bertrams, Darcys, Bingleys and Frank Churchills, who gracefully conjugated the verb "flaner", and felt no call to join up or make munitions. 8

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7 Cecil Roberts, "Jane the First," Bookman, Vol. 73, p. 210.

8 L.M.Ragg, "Jane Austen and the War of Her Time," Contemporary Review, Vol. 158, p. 547.

Miss Ragg's arguments are sound and sane, and she recreates the atmosphere of the period effectively in a few sentences. Her suggestion that the public demanded an escapist literature is not too difficult to believe; that so much space should have been devoted to such a superficial handling of a minor issue is a greater problem.

A.B.Walkely has his own view of Jane Austen's scorn for her age, "the dreadful epoch of pomposity in which she lived, and which she<sup>9</sup> lashed with her unsympathetic and merciless fun."

She may be said to have drawn up an indictment against the British aristocracy. The class just below: the squires, clergymen, and naval officers were sugar, and spice, and all that's nice; once they got a handle to their names, and they became snipes and snails and puppy dog's tails. Perhaps that is why Emma is the most joyous of her books. It is the story without magnates; there are no class distinctions to ruffle the author's equanimity. 10

A mild form of semantics afflicts O.F.Emerson who with bright enthusiasm explains "gowland" as it occurs in Persuasion, Vol. ii, ch.iv, and "Rumford", in Northanger Abbey, Vol. ii, ch. v.<sup>11</sup>

A number of the critics avoid criticism by focusing attention upon sources and influences; an emphasis, which it would seem had been overdone to the point of weariness. To ignore this line altogether, would be, of

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9 A.B.Walkley, "Aversions of Authors", Living Age, Vol. 315, p. 588.

10 Ibid., p. 586.

11 O.F.Emerson, "Two Notes on Jane Austen", German and English Philology, Apr. 1919, pp. 217-20.

course, a grievous excess. "In order to comprehend an age of thought or literature we need to know what broad currents of influence have helped to impregnate the intelligence or imagination of men with certain themes, conceptions, and moods.<sup>12</sup>

But, it is not possible to gather all the material out of which a work of literature has grown; and if we could have them all in our hand, they would be only dry bones; the spirit that breathed upon them is everything.<sup>13</sup> An example of this type of sterile research is Reitzel's<sup>14</sup> detailed comparison of Lover's Vows, and Kotzebue's Das Liebeskind, and C.R. Lias' even more futile quotation from Gibbons' Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, which he evidences as the source of Pride and Prejudice, instead of the more generally accepted Fanny Burney. He quotes from Chapter II:

Without destroying the distinction of ranks a distant prospect (but surely an echo) of freedom and honor was presented even to those whom pride and prejudice almost disdained to number among the human species. <sup>15</sup>

A.B. Hopkins peruses Miss Austen's novels and letters and finds allusion to over forty works of fiction with which Jane Austen seems to have been acquainted.<sup>16</sup> Admitting the number must constitute but a fraction of her total achievement, he attempts to prove that most, if not

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12 Louis Cazamian, "Criticism in the Making," Macmillan, New York, p. 13.

13 Ibid., p. 12.

14 W. Reitzel, "Mansfield Park and Lover's Vows," Review of English Studies, Vol. 9, Oct. 1933, pp. 451-6.

15 C.R. Lias, "Diocletian's Cabbages", TLS, Aug. 1929, p. 652.

16 A.B. Hopkins, "Jane Austen," PMLA, Vol. 40, p. 399.

all of her reading was contemporary. Hopkins' curiosity as a critic is primarily directed throughout to the possibilities of Miss Austen's reading. He opposes Goldwin Smith, who in 1890 stated that there is barely a trace of French reading in her work, and that Voltaire and Rousseau were not likely to find their way to the shelves of an English parsonage. Says Hopkins:

Subsequent biographical study, however, has disclosed the fact that Rousseau, at least, may have been known to the novelist at an early age. The Austen-Leighs state that by 1789 Jane's favorite brother, the brilliant Henry, was at Oxford, contributing to the Loiterer, a paper on the sentimental school of Rousseau, considering how far 'the indulgence of the above named sentiments affects the immediate happiness or misery of human life.' In 1789 Jane was fourteen, and if capable of producing Love and Freindship at sixteen, must have been able to appreciate family discussion of Henry's paper, if not to talk of it with Henry himself. 17

A more logical because better documented source discussion is Sadlier's on the "horrid novels" in Northanger Abbey, in which he not only lists the original titles, but shows that Jane Austen had, in her time, more pleasure and even profit from the Gothic romance than she  
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saw occasion to record.

Edith Brown's Date of the Watson's is a good example of the scientific as opposed to the appreciative approach to criticism. Miss Brown is seriously and bibliographically concerned with the water-marks

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17 Ibid., p. 400.

18 M. Sadlier, "Northanger Novels," Edinburgh Review, Vol. 246, pp. 91-106.

on the manuscript, The Watsons, and builds up what is to her a convincing case for Tuesday, October 13, 1807, as opposed to Austen-Leigh's 1805 as  
19  
a possible date of composition.

Whether or not the point is made, the study is over-balanced since so far as regards Jane Austen, chronology is an almost useless aid. She revised all her novels several times, and it is never quite safe to assert absolutely which of the earlier novels is first.

One should be cautious in drawing a line between the so-called earlier and later novels, or in asserting that Jane Austen could write at 20 as well or better, or very nearly as well, as at 40; we can not be quite sure of knowing how she wrote at 20. 20

Psychoanalytic criticism has not left Jane Austen untouched. It is startling, not to say disconcerting, to be told that four of the novels, Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, Mansfield Park, and Emma, are  
21  
creative sublimations of an Oedipus Complex in Miss Austen. Mr. Gorer elucidates his Freudian theory:

All four novels are about young women, Marianne, Elizabeth, Fanny, Emma, who are made love to by, but finally reject the charming but worthless lover, Willoughby, Wickham, Crawford, Frank Churchill, and finally marry a man whom they esteem and admire rather than love passionately, Colonel Brandon, Darcy, Edmund Bertram, Mr. Knightly. But, the similarities in the novels do not end; in

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19 Edith C. Brown, "Date of the Watsons", Spectator, June 11, 1929, pp. 1016-17.

20 R.W.Chapman in introduction to Northanger Abbey, pp. xii-iii.

21 Geoffrey Gorer, "Myth in Jane Austen", Life and Letters Today, Vol. 21, pp. 38-44.



all except the last to be written, Emma, when Mrs. Woodhouse is dead before the novel opens; the heroine's misfortunes and discomfitures are, to a great extent due to the folly, stupidity and malice of her mother. 22

Gorer believes that Jane Austen gave up a lover for her father.

"Only right at the end, lonely and middle-aged...did she cry out against her starved life (in *Persuasion*) and the selfishness of the father on whose account it had been starved." 23

Professor Cazamian distinguishes the inherent fallacies of such an attitude:

That all the elements of consciousness are directly or indirectly inter-related is a commonplace of psychology. All states of mind belong to an organic whole; and there is no part of that organism but enters into some sort of relation with all the others. But...to magnify this relation into a significant and causal one is to lend it a privileged value, and expect that it should make clearer the working of ...genius, is confessing to a singular misconception of facts. Not only is the wealth of creative imagination and spiritual desire thus impoverished; but the aesthetic appreciation of art, entirely warped. 24

A similar dogmatic twist in the realm of psychoanalytic interpretation 25  
mars Leonie Villard's critical approach to Jane Austen's work. She is  
not beyond sweeping generalizations in her effort to make a point. Alleging

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22 Ibid., p. 39.

23 Ibid., p. 43.

24 Cazamian, Op. cit., p. 96.

25 Leonie Villard, "Jane Austen, Psychoanalyst," Living Age, Vol. 326, pp. 110-12.

that Jane Austen's novels are not yet seen for what they really are--a study of the subconscious, she supports her thesis by hinting that at a time when subconscious psychology was not even conceived of, her intuition of its existence was little short of miraculous. <sup>26</sup>

She professes to see in Emma a complete development of the subconscious, citing as evidence

In Emma, an incident in appearance not more fraught with meaning than any other, a work apparently done at random, a thought that rises unbidden in the mind, and is at once dismissed, in all these will be found at the end of the book, to have possessed a deep unsuspected significance. <sup>27</sup>

Even those who allow their fancy to play with the universal all-embracing empire of the libido know that as a practical purpose, there is no such thing. <sup>28</sup> The formula and phrases of psychoanalysis are dangerous and no less in the interpretation of letters than in that of life. The fault, so far as literary criticism is concerned, lies in the fact that it narrows and simplifies overmuch. What is one element among many, most often of negligible value, hardly ever predominant, is magnified into the all-in-all of motive, theme, and expression. <sup>29</sup>

In the chorus of almost universal adulation which Jane Austen's work elicits, it is refreshing to meet some who are able to see limitations and defects. A.R. Turpin, Cook, and E.M. Forster note that there ~~are~~ unsuccessful, because unsatisfactorily realized characters. <sup>30</sup>

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26 Ibid., p. 111.

27 Ibid., p. 112.

28 Cazamian, Op. cit., p. 88.

29 Ibid., p. 99.

30 Turpin, Op. cit. pp. 53-57.

in the novels; that there are evidences of slipshod grammatical  
31  
blunders.

At the beginning of this chapter, the variety of periodical criticism was referred to. To analyse each of the articles separately would be out of the question, but an attempt has been made to draw together the threads which bind the outlooks, ideas, and purposes of the differing groups. There is little continuity of thought, and the sum total of the work in this field is vague, and chaotic in nature, limited in range, and generally neutral in effect.

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31 Cook, Times Literary Supplement, Mar. 2, 1922, pp. 53-68.

## CONCLUSION

Criticism about Jane Austen has reflected the rather definite patterns of literary criticism of each age. During her life, and at the time of her death she was read and appreciated, but scarcely analysed. The leading critics of the later 19th century gave little official heed to her novels. Such publicity as she received was concerned with biographical facts, and usually dismissed the novels summarily with faint praise or blame. The approbation Scott, Macaulay, or Lewes manifested was of such subjective quality as to be censurable from a critical viewpoint. The literary histories of the period virtually ignored her work, or accorded it brief recognition, together with the other early women novelists, Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, Harriet Martineau, and others of that ilk. There was during this period an increasing emphasis on the moral efficacy of the novels.

During the early 20th century a kind of genteel realism and respectable liberalism flourished in literary criticism, and books and articles on Jane Austen were paraded with an interest in what the critics were pleased to call her admirable devotion to detail. The questioning and contra-traditional attitude which was the aftermath of the World War, resulted in an iconoclastic outburst from Oscar Firkins which shocked the pedants into a fresh reading of Jane Austen, but with no fresh conclusions. Intrinsically the work was of little worth, but it

was significant since it brought a new viewpoint into a study that was becoming stodgy, and a revival of interest in an author whose works were in danger of becoming museum pieces.

Criticism in the last two decades has been chaotic and contradictory. And, although much has been written about Jane Austen, its vigor has been vitiated by being shackled with the critics' theories, humanism, impressionism, or Marxism. Source maniacs have expended their energies in prolonged literary detective work, tracing her reading possibilities and ignoring the alchemy of creation. Psychoanalysts, reading her novels with Freud in the other hand, have interpreted them in the light of the libido, coupled with an insistence on their sublimation of Miss Austen's own complexes.

Pale pink professors in line with the Marxist schools of criticism have seen signs of class consciousness in her cynic portrayal of the aristocrats and little capitalists of her day.

Men whose training and taste would have qualified them to speak intelligently, appreciatively and critically, have given themselves especially to the study of poetry; and those like Wilson, who have shown an interest in fiction have devoted themselves to the modern scene.

The most ambitious as well as the most significant analysis, that of Mary Lascelles fails to achieve its purpose. The study is learned, sensitive, serious and intelligent, and always says something that is almost right. The weakness lies in the fact that Miss Lascelles is

ridden by the scientific viewpoint, and her careful work becomes a laboratory experiment with the cadaver of Jane Austen's work completely dissected in the post-mortem.

There is still room, it would appear, for an adequate estimate and appreciative analysis of Jane Austen's works. A study of this kind is no more impossible with Jane Austen than with any author, for although "the greatness of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards, we must remember that whether it is literature or not can be determined only by literary standards."<sup>1</sup>

It should still be possible for a critic to examine a work from the standpoint of unprejudiced detachment; to search for the real values in Jane Austen's work, and to estimate it according to aesthetic laws. Though different types of architecture appeal to different people, there still remain fundamental principles of art, symmetry, proportion balance and line to which Classic, Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque must conform. Similar basic qualities exist for the novel, and a work will succeed or fail of immortality as much by its relation to these as to its essential message.

Any just criticism of Jane Austen's work, then, will consider the intrinsic qualities displayed, and will make use of such aids as biographical research, sources and influences can offer in the ascertaining of the theme which she has chosen, its narrative

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1 Morton Dauwen Zabel, Literary Opinion in America, quotes T.S. Eliot, intro. p. v.

possibilities, how those possibilities have been made use of, in what way the story is constructed, ordered, and told, and the extent to which the actual writing is felicitous. In that domain the one question to be answered is whether or not Jane Austen has done her work well.<sup>2</sup>

Large and ultimate issues, though they may illuminate, can never supersede the aesthetic interest, which is essentially the proper operation of literary criticism.<sup>3</sup> But the aesthetic interest can not afford to dispose of the scientific approach. Spencer<sup>4</sup> points out that the function of the critic: to isolate, to analyse, to compare, and to evaluate, must first be performed on the level of technique--but it must not be allowed to rest there. Jane Austen's background is social and intellectual, and will be the source of the pattern of her ideas, but they serve solely as background to Jane Austen, who remains an independent and vital figure for literary scrutiny.

If it is only the bad critic who writes because he is "possessed by a passion...to disseminate some specific doctrine; psychological, epistemological, historical, or esthetic"<sup>5</sup> then Jane Austen's novels have been the happy hunting-grounds of bad critics. It is time some good critic went out for game.

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2 Montgomery Belgon, "The Testimony of Fiction", Southern Review, Vol. 4, p. 149.

3 Muller, Op. cit., p. 192.

4 Theodore Spencer, "The Critic's Function", Sewanee Review, Vol. 41, pp. 552 ff.

5 Zabel, Op. cit., intro. p. xxxii.

## APPENDIX

Three studies of Jane Austen's work appearing in Scrutiny, 1940<sup>1</sup> and 1941, were drawn to the attention of the writer after the conclusion of this study. Since both the attitude of the critics and the manner of handling is challenging and original, and since all three articles show evidence of a new and thoroughly scholarly approach to the problem of Jane Austen's work, some reference to them seems necessary here. The first to appear, Regulated Hatred, by D.W. Harding, the editor of Scrutiny appeared in March, 1940.

Harding notes the general critical attitude toward the novels, the blind belief that her scope is restricted; and that she is a delicate satirist who reveals with inimitable lightness of touch the comic foibles and amiable weaknesses of the people whom she lived amongst and liked.<sup>2</sup> He objects to this attitude, and contends that in order to enjoy her books without disturbance, those who retain the conventional notion of her work must always have had slightly to misread what she wrote at a number of scattered points.<sup>3</sup>

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- 1 D.W. Harding. "Regulated Hatred: An Aspect of the Work of Jane Austen." Scrutiny. Vol. VIII, No. 4, March, 1940, pp. 346-362.  
Q.D. Leavis. "A Critical Theory of Jane Austen's Writings." Scrutiny. Vol. x, No. 1, June, 1941, pp. 61-87; Vol. x, No. 2, October, 1941, pp. 114-142.  
2 Harding, Op. cit., p. 347.  
3 Ibid.



To prove, he calls attention to the numerous unexpected astringencies which occur throughout the novels, which the comfortable reader overlooks or passes by as slight imperfections and errors of tone. Advancing his thesis that the novels were a safety valve for pent-up emotions, and an attempt to find the means of an unobtrusive spiritual survival without open conflict with the friendly people around her, he is free to examine the apprent satire for evidences of self preservation.

Says Harding,

Mrs. Bennet, according to the Austen tradition, is one of our richly comic characters about whom we can feel superior, condescending, perhaps a trifle sympathetic and above all heartily amused and free from care. Everything conspires to make this the natural interpretation, once you are willing to overlook Jane Austen's bold and brief statement of her own attitude to her: 'She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper.' 4

Quoting from Emma: "She denied none of it aloud, and agreed to none of it in private," Mr. Harding remarks, "This well illustrates Jane Austen's typical dilemma: of being intensely critical of people to whom she also has strong emotional attachments." 5

His tracing of the Cinderella theme throughout the novels is stimulating and appears to hold water. Harding does not state, but rather suggests that the absence of a motivating mother in all the stories is a defense sublimation of Jane Austen's own not too happy relations with

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4 Ibid., p. 352.

5 Ibid., p. 355.

her mother.

Most children are likely to have some conflict of attitude towards their mother, finding her in some aspects an ideal object of love, and in others an obstacle to their wishes and a bitter disappointment. For a child such as Jane Austen who actually was in many ways more sensitive and able than her mother, one can understand that this conflict may persist in some form for a very long time. 6

Harding's study is admittedly not a balanced appraisal of Jane Austen's work, since it is deliberately lop-sided, and neglects the many points at which the established view seems adequate. However, it does suggest a slightly different emphasis in reading, and opens the door to new and valuable interpretations.

The two essays by Q.D. Leavis, which appeared in June and October, 1941, are even more independent. R. Brimley Johnson had shown the direct relation between Fanny Burney's novels and the work of Jane Austen, a relation between Fanny Burney's novels and the work of Jane Austen, a relation deprecated by Mary Lascelles, who emphasized the importance of Jane Austen's own early works as prime influence in her later achievements. Mrs. Leavis utilizes the contribution of both critics and goes farther than either in her skillful analysis of the "geological structure" of Jane Austen's writing, the earliest layers of which go back to her earliest writings with subsequent accretions from her reading, her personal life, and those lives most closely connected with hers. 7

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6 Ibid., p. 360.

7 Leavis, Op. cit., p. 64.

Mrs. Leavis does not quote Lascelles, but follows her lead in tracing bits of situation and stage business made in Jane Austen's teens, which turn up at intervals to be worked into the shape required by the story in  
8  
hand.

She is one with Harding in believing that Jane Austen explored her  
9  
own problems by dramatizing them, and in this way giving them relief, and she reiterates his interpretation of the Cinderella theme.

The Letters are full of tart accounts of family invalids who had to be borne with--Mrs. Austen herself is one of them, and Jane Austen was not the first daughter who visibly suffered from having lived too long at home with mother. 10

Mrs. Leavis' critical aims are clearly stated. She believes that by examining how Jane Austen worked it is possible to determine what kind of novelist she was; by looking to see how she wrote a novel it is possible to discover what her object was in writing. Without such a preliminary no criticism of her novels can be just or even safe.

It would seem, that if the forthcoming book which Mrs. Leavis promises to produce does appear, origins, alterations, and the ultimate purpose of each novel will be handled with space for illustration, comparison, and detailed deductiveness. A really valuable if not definitive contribution to the critical library on Jane Austen is in sight.

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8  
Ibid., p. 66.

9 Ibid., p. 82.

10 Ibid., p. 83.

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The thesis, "A Survey of the Critical Writings on Jane Austen", written by Sister Mary Hester Valentine, has been accepted by the Graduate School with reference to form, and by the readers whose names appear below, with reference to content. It is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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